LOOSE.
RELEASED.
FREEDOM.

Loose, Released, Freedom by BloodStalker500

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Summary: My first attempt at a fanfic. By all means, it shouldn't have happened. SCP-343 (AKA God) had decided to shake up the Foundation by sending several SCPs and D-9341 back in time to Hawkins, Indiana, in the year 1984. Now that they are free and away from the Foundation, can the chaotic and newly free SCPs get along with each other and the residents without destroying everything?

1. Prologue

Prologue

He sat quietly, surrounded by His ageless books and mysterious furnitures that mankind had done a great job of designing over the centuries. Even as the fireplace quietly burned as it had for eons now, countless - no, immeasurable - amounts of information was pouring into His limitless mind, the roars across space, the ripples and tiny crackles in the rifts of time, all of them He was aware of each passing second. Had He been human, His mind would've been destroyed in the first nanoseconds of existence from the sheer burden of so much knowledge pouring into His mind. Of course, everyone knew otherwise. Well, everyone at this Site, anyways.

Another bite of his favorite hamburger.

Even as He chewed silently, the many voices and thoughts of all mankind - as in, all the cries, struggles, triumphs and joys of mankind - filtered infinitely into His vast mind.

"Aaand he scores-!"

"Yes, Miranda, you can-!"

"IT'S OVER NINE THOUSAAAAA-!"

"Whoa! Watch out for his butcher knife, Pete-!"

"HEY! SLENDERMAN RIPOFF-!"

He slightly raised a brow at the last one, but nonetheless the eternal and infinite voices and thoughts surged into the vast abyss that was His consciousness. He opened His mouth-

"I... I want to go home... Please...!"

"They will be cured... They must be, or my name isn't-!"

"I'm so sorry... it was the biggest mistake of my life, I-!"

"Disgusting..."

"Erm... Hello? Does someone out there need a happy hug...?"

"When I finally find that traitorous-!"

"MY FACE! MY FACE! MY FACE! MY FACE-!"

"FreeFreeFreeFreeFreeFreeFreeFreeFreeFree-!"

"Mr. Mowie, what do you think it's like out-?"

"-just like that rotten [REDACTED] you called a girlfriend. Speaking of which, why don't you-?"

- and bit down casually, savoring the taste of the burger. He had been used to the many sorrowful, malevolent, lonesome, wistful and weary voices and thoughts that the Foundation's many Sites seemed to produce through its many experiments and anomalous prisoners. Even the D-Class personnel, however sinful they were prior to their stays at the Sites, were forced to endure and suffer at the hands of not only the malevolent entities the facilities contained, but even the security and higher-ups regularly tormented them. However, He had decided long ago to let humanity go on its own course, and let them face whatever justice or rewards they may or may not reap in the future. He inclined his head forward for another bite-

"Freeeee..."

Suddenly, His eyes widened at hearing that voice.

That voice... that same, impossibly old, familiar voice...

Immediately, His eyes glowed an ethereal white, scouring the many dimensions and worlds for what could possibly-

No. It couldn't be.

In a far, distant corner of the multiverse, across thousands upon thousands of universes, dimensions and realities, floating in a fixed area between the infinitely tiny gaps of space and time, there he was.

Trapped, tormented, tortured, as he had been for countless eons... until very soon. As He watched, only on chain remained upon his enormous bulk, his never changing expression empty yet eager.

Soon.

His eyes stopped glowing. He stared at his hamburger.

What to do...

"I SWEAR TO GOD, I'M NOT GONNA FAIL AGAIN!"

Suddenly, one voice in the eternal stream rose above the countless others. Not in pitch or volume, but in emotion. Blinking His eyes closed and then opening, He viewed where in the infinite universe the voice came from...

. . .

"C'mon... c'mon! *Huff!* Please, I can't die... *Pant, Huff!*... yet! Not after all this!"

A young man ran through yet another blank hallway, his orange jumpsuit uniform soaked in sweat, his shoes pounding against the cold floor. However, none of that mattered to Benjamin Oliver Walker at this point. He'd seen far too many horrors, monsters, ruthless guards and general insanity to give up now. Even if he wasn't killed by the guards or various monstrosities hiding throughout the facility, he knew he would most likely be recaptured and put through more torture by the Foundation if he was caught due to... recent discoveries he had made during his escape...

"Damn that computer... Gate B, my ass!" He grunted, finally coming upon an elevator. Without hesitation, he punched the elevator button, barely even registering the slight pain in his finger. He'd never made it this far before... all that pain, all that horror... it all amounted to these final moments...

The elevator doors opened, and Benjamin eagerly jumped in, not wanting to spend another minute in any one spot in that damned facility. As he waited for the doors to reopen at the destination, the ridiculously calm elevator music almost seemed more insane than the

monsters this place had contained. Almost.

Ding!

"Finally..." Ben muttered, as the elevators opened. As soon as he stepped out, he noticed several things. One, the skylight in the ceiling with the Foundation's logo with the Sun's almost alien light boring down on him. Two: The exit that seemed so near yet so far on the opposite side of the room, leading to a bridge guarded by rails and what seemed to be a tunnel underneath, labeled "Gate A". Three: The dark-colored humanoid entity that appeared from a pitch-black hole in the ground, turning to him and laughing menacingly.

Ben's eyes widened. He'd almost forgotten about 106, and was getting ready to make a break for it. However, instead of attacking him, SCP-106 strode straight for the large exit, leaving the ground where it stepped corroded and entirely black in coloration. Ben knew from experience not to go anywhere near it. Suddenly, a helicopter's whirring blades registered in his ears, and he instantly looked up through the skylight. To his horror, several Apache helicopters were visible, hovering above the skylight with their onboard guns ready to fire.

Suddenly, gunfire erupted from somewhere, and Ben leaped to the edge of the railing to hide himself from sight. Looking to the exit, he noticed SCP-106 had walked out of the exit and was casually strolling over to the bridge, where multiple MTF soldiers were waiting.

"SCP-106 is breaking out of the facility at Gate A. Fire the H.I.D. Turret immediately. Do not let it get across the bridge.", a voice crackled over the intercom, causing Ben to think.

'They're not here for me...', Ben thought, having a realization, 'They're after him'.

Immediately, the soldiers began firing directly onto SCP-106. Hell, even several nearby turrets began firing nonstop, sending waves upon waves of bullets and missiles onto the Old Man. However, as Ben watched, the anomaly continued casually strolling forwards through the explosions and gunshots. Suddenly, Ben realized that if he made a run for it, the soldiers might not notice him at all. Leaving his hiding

place, he ran through the exit, along the trail of corroded ground that 106 left, and stopped right at the bridge, where the nonstop explosions and gufire nearly rendered him deaf. Looking around desperately, Ben tried to find some other escape route.

'Come on... come on...!', He thought desperately, craning his neck until his eyes finally found a small stairway to his left that led directly under the bridge that 106 was still walking across. Knowing that the SCP would not inadvertantly distract the soldiers forever, Ben sprinted straight for the stairway and practically flew down the steps, eager to get away from the heavy artillery being fired on the bridge. He nearly tripped and fell, but steadied himself in time thanks to experience of running from monsters and hostile guards. Once he reached the bottom did he finally turn back to the bridge, noticing that the gunfire had ceased.

"Hrreeerrrarrghh!", SCP-106 screeched, melting back into the floor and out of sight. Seeing that the anomaly tha had pursued him for so long was gone, Ben almost breathed a sigh of relief...

... Until the helicopters moved away from where 106 was and turned to him, their high-powered guns trained entirely on one rogue D-Class.

"... Shit...", Ben uttered, and he turned right to notice a door to his right in the wall, and he barely leaped straight for it and out of range before the Apaches rained bullets down, dodging certain death again. Without hesitation, he smashed his fist into the button to open it, and instantly sprinted through the doorway and into a narrow tunnel underground, footsteps pounding on the metal floor. He turned his head back to see several MTF guards following him into the tunnel, guns aimed and ready to fire.

"You gotta be [REDACTED] me!" He seethed, as there was almost no room to potentially avoid any bullets they might've fired. Just then, however, something strange happened, though not stranger than the other things he'd seen.

The tunnel closed up.

Ben stopped in his tracks and wheeled around to face where the MTF

guards had come, now seeing only a blank wall in the direction he'd ran from. From the looks of it, it almost seemed like the tunnel walls closed in on themselves like doors, though that wasn't possible at all. Ben stopped and mentally sighed.

'Since when does anything here qualify as "normal"?', He thought to himself. Suddenly, however, he heard several footsteps behind them, and instantly turned to face the end of the tunnel he'd originally been sprinting to. His hairs stood up straight as he realized they were a group of three soldiers dressed entirely in black... wait...

"You know too much to let them get you...", the soldier at the front said quietly and calmly, neither he nor his comrades moving an inch. Ben finally realized what was wrong.

'Wait... these aren't Foundation soldiers...', Ben realized, noticing they had different uniforms and gear than the MTF guards he'd been running from.

. . .

Huh. So that's what caused it...

He took another bite, munching softer than before and without as much vigor. He already knew this would happen, but now it was here. So many loops and restarts... so many deaths-

Wait. That was it. This might work.

He thought about it. He snapped his fingers, then went for another bite.

. . .

"... You're coming with us", the same soldier from before finished, and Ben could only watch as the soldiers by his side began walking towards him. Before he could even react to this change of events, a bright pillar of white light suddenly erupted from the ground beneath him, engulfing him as wind picked up around the light, circling him and causing the air to blow wildly around the tunnel.

SHRIIIING!

All at once, Ben's body began hovering off the ground, stunning him into silence from shock as his feet left the ground.

"W-WHOA! WHAT THE F$^&!? WHAT IS THIS!?", Ben yelled, having not seen anything like this during his escape of the facility. The strange soldiers immediately jumped back in surprise, obviously having not expected this either. A radio on the front soldier crackled to life.

"SN-15 to SN-12 do you copy? What is going on down there!?", a voice spoke through the radio, "Have you captured the target?".

The soldier at the front grabbed it from his vest and spoke into it. "SN-12 to SN-15, No, we haven't. Target seems to be under the effects of an unknown anomoaly, unable to contain and capture without serious risk".

The D-Class paid no mind to their conversation, only focusing on the fact that, somehow, he was floating slowly off the ground ina bright pillar of ethereal light. Slowly, he realized that his vision was slowly fading as the light around him grew brighter and brighter and the wind grew in intensity, causing the soldiers to raise their arms in front of their faces to avoid being blinded.

"W-What!? This is-!" The lead soldier was interruped by the light and wind suddenly exploding outwards, filling the entire tunnel with a blinding ethereal glow and a blast of cold air for a few moments. The soldiers stood still, arms still covering their faces, until the light died down and the dust settled. Lowering their guard, the soldiers looked ahead and were shocked.

"... W-What...?" The lead soldier asked quietly in disbelief, his cold and emotionless tone vanished and replaced by one of complete shock. Benjamin Oliver Walker, AKA D-9341, was gone. In the spot where he was last seen standing was a large black hard-cover book. It was titled "A Complete And Total Description of Over 4,000 Anomalies and Objects Contained and Utilized by the SCP Foundation", with no author signature. Sticking out of the cover of the book was a note that read:

Dear Chaos Insurgency,

Sorry for the inconvenience. Had to borrow your guy for a while. Please accept this deeply informational text as compensation, and thank you for your cooperation.

Yours Truly,

343

The soldiers simply stared in disbelief. Finally, after what felt like hours, the lead soldier of the three spoke.

"What the [REDACTED]!?"

. . .

GASP!

Eleven suddenly awoke in a sweat, breathing heavily. She looked about her small room in the cabin, not noticing anything out of the ordinary. Using her superior senses to check her surroundings, she finally decided that there was nothing to be feared. She couldn't even remember why she had woken up, come to think about it.

Calmed down, she laid back down and felt her eyelids grew heavy, soon falling asleep. She, like all other humans at the time, was oblivious to the multiple flashes of light that rained down on the surrounding areas, each carrying an entity the potential to shake the very foundations of the world and disrupt the normalcy of the entire planet.

Then again... everyone involved would soon find out, one way or another, that the term "normal" never really had a place in the world to begin with.

. . .

2. The Arrival

The Arrival

A/N

Happy New Years! :D

It is officially 2018, anyone who might be reading this! And what better way to celebrate that than by updating my very first story on FanFiction?

Just as a little warning moving forward, I might not be able to get the characters' personalities and actions exactly as they would be in canon, as well as certain events and other elements that happened/took place in the 80's, so please bear with me if I happen to make any anachronisms or errors regarding certain elements of the time period and characters that this story uses.

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things nor the SCP Foundation Mythos. Those go to their respective owners, neither of which are me.

Emily wasn't sure what had happened. One second, she and Mr. Mowie had been playing together in their room while the strange men watched from the weird cameras and windows, with Poofa hovering nearby. Then, she started floating in a strange glow. The next thing she knew, she was sitting calmly in a forest, with birds chirping and trees standing tall like they had been for decades. Of course, she didn't think of it much. All she thought about was the fact that her friends were nowhere in sight.

"… M-Mr. Mowie…?" Emily called out nervously from her spot on the forest floor. She'd only awoken a few moments prior, but already the trees seemed to tower like giants around her. She'd seen pictures that the strange men had showed her and even had smaller trees in her room… but that was about it. She hadn't seen anything like this.

"M-Mr. Mowie?" She called out again, more nervously this time. It

was already nighttime, and already the shadows and dark shapes in the gloom seemed to be twisting and churning around her. Suddenly, a crunching sound reached her ears, and she quickly turned on her heels to face the source of the sound, expecting to see something terrifying. Luckily, however, it was just a doe, standing by a tree and watching her curiously.

"Huh? Oh! Hello, Mrs. Deer!" Emily chirped cheerfully, brazenly walking up to it and petting its head. The doe flinched and looked like it was about to run for a second, but quickly relaxed, leaning forward and allowing Emily to pet its head. "What are you doing here, Mrs. Deer? Shouldn't you be with your family?" She asked, rubbing the deer's head eagerly, enjoying the feeling of its soft fur.

"WROAARG!"

Suddenly, a loud roaring noise echoed out of the woods, and the deer sprang away and leapt into the brush and out of sight. A second later, a large animal burst from the nearby bushes, tearing through the growth and crushing the plants it ran over. It had the body, limbs and size of a polar bear, but the head of a salamander with no visible eyes, and a long squirrel-like tail. Its entire body was covered in thick fur, with its head, back and tail primarily a bright blue with its underbelly and under its neck being an equally bright pink. It surged forth towards Emily, who was visibly startled by the arrival of this… thing. However, rather than scream and/or run away, she smiled and eagerly ran up to it.

"MR. MOWIE!" Emily shouted, throwing his miniscule arms around the large animal, unable to completely reach around its large body. Mr. Mowie made what sounded like a dog's bark, except deeper in pitch, and opened his mouth to lick Emily's face joyfully. Emily laughed happily, practically jumping in excitement. "There you are, Mr. Mowie! You scared me!" Emily laughed. Then however, she turned back to where the doe had run off to.

"Aww… you scared away Mrs. Deer, Mr. Mowie." Emily said somberly, causing Mr. Mowie to droop his head and whimper shamefully. Pursing her lip, Emily looked like she was about to further admonish him when another strange sound echoed through the forest.

Flooorp! *Flooorp!*

It sounded like balloons being inflated and deflated repeatedly, although slightly squeakier. Turning his head, Mr. Mowie made something of a growling noise, although not hostile in nature or sound. Facing where he was facing, Emily peered through the growth until a strange figure appeared from the treetops.

It resembled something insectoid, only with one body segment. Its body was grey, round and about 4 feet wide, with eleven tentacle-like limbs stretching from its side ending in two long fingers, with 5 limbs on each side with the last one hanging from its front, just under two black bulbous eyes with no pupils or irises. The most striking trait about it, however, was the four large dark-colored sacs on top of its round body, twitching about. The sacs were the cause of the strange noise, shrinking and growing every few seconds. Just like with Mr. Mowie, Emily showed no signs of fear. In fact, she seemed very pleased with this turn of events.

"Poofa! There you are!" She called to it, running just underneath its bulbous form. "Poofa" hovered about 4 feet above Emily, staring down at her and Mr. Mowie, who walked slowly up with Emily. Poofa made a slight chittering noise, like that of a squirrel with a slightly lower pitch and echoing sound, along with the noises her sacs made, constantly taking in air. Jumping up and down, Emily playfully tried to reach her long arms to no avail, giggling all the while.

"Hehehe! We're all together now! Isn't that right, Flozzle?" Emily said, looking down at her bright orange shirt. Her "shirt" vibrated in response, as well as changed color to a bright yellow and then immediately back to its original orange, making a strange purring sound similar to a cat. Humming cheerfully, Emily skipped over to Mr. Mowie, climbing his thick fur onto his back, riding him like a horse.

"Let's go, Mr. Mowie! Whoa-ho!" Emily yelled happily, pointing her finger forwards with a big smile. With a mix of a bark and roar, Mr. Mowie surged forth, charging through the trees, with Poofa floating close behind.

He immediately knew something was amiss, even from within his pitch-dark coffin. Opening his eyes, he instinctively struggled against the chains he knew held the coffin shut. With an enraged shout, he kicked the coffin open, breaking the chains that held it open and immediately rushed to the door that he couldn't see due to the darkness but knew was there. Rearing his fist back, he blew the door open, and was temporarily stunned by the comparatively warm air that blasted against his ancient tattoo-littered skin and robes, as well as the sound of the locks flying away from the door. One of which flew directly upwards, and was set to land on top of his coffin…

Adjusting his eyes, he could immediately make out the moon in the dark sky, its light showering upon his dark skin.

"Yes…. Yes…."

Breathing heavily, he stepped out of his prison, embracing the feeling of the night air flowing into his lungs. Two completely black swords materialized into his hands, which clenched around their hilts like nothing else mattered. Looking around, he knew immediately that he wasn't in his usual containment chamber. However, he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth, and grinned savagely as he spotted the lights of a town in the distance, and prepared to take a step forwards when the lock that flew up earlier landed on his prison.

THUD!

("OW! Hey, watch it, dumbass!")

Suddenly, he whirled around, looking for the source of the voice. It wasn't necessarily the insult itself that had gotten to him, though. It was the voice's dialect… it wasn't speaking English, like his captors… it was speaking perfect ancient Sumerian. He hadn't heard someone speak that language in countless years, especially with such precision. However, there was nothing around but trees. He was going to decide to simply ignore it when the voice called out again.

("HEY! Are you even 'Abel' to even see me, [REDACTED]!?")

That did it. Without thinking twice, he leapt straight up on top of the giant cube he called a prison, brandishing his blades threateningly

and rather wildly. However, to his surprise, there was no one there. Just a small box.

"… What…?" Abel asked himself quietly, staring down at the small light gray metal box. Then, out of nowhere, the voice spoke again… from the slot on the front of the box.

("Yes, me, you fuckin' moron. You see anyone else just standing here in the middle of the night? No, so quit looking around like a retarded [REDACTED], you [REDACTED] piece of shit.")

Taken aback, Abel stared down at the small box. However, shock quickly turned to anger when the box's insults finally registered, and his breaths deteriorated into snarls and growls.

"Wha… What did you say, you… you abomination!?" Abel yelled, unable to totally comprehend in his increasing anger that he was shouting at an inanimate metal cube. Said box appeared to scoff at him.

("Oh, I'm *an abomination? Look who's talking, you coffin-napping freak. Is it even cozy in there? Oh wait, you don't know, because you're always as lifeless as a worthless fucking doll in there.")*

Abel grounded his teeth together, his fingers clenching tightly around his blades. With a shout, he raised one of his swords into the air, roaring in Sumerian.

("WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME!?")

He brought his left hand down, callously striking his blades on top of the offensive cube. To his surprise, there wasn't as much as a mark on its clean metal surface.

("HA! Is that all, you old [REDACTED]!? I'm surprised you can even move at all after what Cain-!")

("SHUT UP! DON'T MENTION HIS NAME! YOU KNOW NOTHING! RAAAGH! DIE, DIE, DIE! DIE, YOU WORTHLESS EMPTY METAL VESSEL! GAAAUUGH!")

Abel slashed his blades endlessly; his eyes turning blood red as he

sent the box flying with each strike, trying in vain to slash, cut and otherwise destroy the Insult Box. However, not so much as a scratch appeared on the box's surface as it continued shouting insults and taunting jabs into Abel's ears, further provoking him to slash and attack the box with no results other than more offensive taunts.

The sounds of angered screams and taunting laughter filled the night sky as the two SCPs continued their fruitless conflict.

The sounds of the big city – cars honking, teens yelling, and cigarette smoke in the air – were immediate signs that something was very, very wrong. Or right, depending on how you looked at it.

Such thoughts were those currently running about in Cain's head as he abruptly awoke in an alleyway. Blinking his eyes open, he turned his head to the left to find a busy city street near the alley he was in, cars racing by. Getting up to his feet almost instantly, he walked to the edge of the alley to confirm it. He was in the middle of a busy city. Not in his usual containment chamber at the Foundation Site-17.

"What… is this?" Cain muttered to himself, the many bright lights in the city night making him blink repeatedly. Holding his metal arms up to shield his eyes, he immediately became aware that someone… no, something like him would definitely stick out in a crowd of regular civilians, and quickly walked backwards into the otherwise dark and empty alley before anyone could see him. Standing up against a wall by a dumpster, he pressed a metal hand to his forehead.

'Could this… be a dream?' He asked himself in his mind, unable to totally process what was happening. Just a few moments ago, he had been humbly resting after having lunch in the site cafeteria, and now he was apparently in the middle of a large city. He frowned.

'No… it can't be. Unless an anomaly is at work somehow, this is most certainly not a dream…' Cain chided himself. Shaking his head, he pushed himself off the wall and slowly moved to the end of the alley. To his dismay, there were people everywhere. Since his only clothes were a toga and jean shorts, there was nothing to cover up his metal arms and spinal cord, which would definitely stick out like a sore

thumb. He didn't really mind getting taken by the Foundation again, but he might as well enjoy his freedom before they find him again. Looking up, he noticed several pipes in the alley that led directly to the rooftops above. He smiled.

'Perfect…' Cain thought to himself as he easily walked over and climbed up the pipes. It was all quite simple, no different than when he was young and used to climb trees with Ab-.

'No… not now…'

He forced those thoughts away as he reached the top, jumping up and onto the rooftop and looking out over the city. Once again, the various lights and sounds pierced his senses, and he was reminded of the time when he visited New York, right before the Foundation found him, and after that incident with those gang members…

Cain suddenly realized that he did not have a good record with big cities. Looking about, he decided that finding clothes or anything really, to cover his bionics was the first course of action. With that, he turned and ran across the rooftops, looking down at the alleys beneath him as he leapt from rooftop to rooftop to try to find anything he might be able to use. He didn't exactly relish the idea of using clothes used and/or discarded by a hobo or other unfortunate city dweller, but he didn't really have much of a choice. Suddenly, however, he heard someone scream from an alley he'd just passed over… and then a *thud!*, indicating someone had just collapsed on the ground.

Stopping in his tracks, he leapt back over and ran to the other side, peering down into the alley. To his shock, he saw what looked like a man in a dark cloak and hood stooping down over a man, a hobo by the looks of his ragged clothing, motionless on the floor. He watched as the man appeared to… perform surgery on the man?

As Cain looked on, the dark-cloaked man appeared to insert several mysterious chemicals from vials into the man's innards, as well as moving various organs and other body parts about using a scalpel, with extreme precision as he did so. Also, after a few seconds, Cain realized that the figure was humming a song. A hymn, to be precise.

'Wait... "Amazing Grace"…?'

Finally believing to have looked on long enough, as well as seeing that no one else was noticing what was going on, Cain shook his head and jumped down into the alley, landing with a thud.

"You! What are you doing!?" Cain almost shouted at the mysterious figure. The figure stopped what he was doing for a moment before resuming, sewing up the man and then standing to his full height. To Cain's surprise, the figure was taller than he was, although not by much. The figure turned around to meet Cain, and he saw that the figure was completely clad in a dark cloak and hood with a belt holding a small pouch. The most startling trait he had, however, was the white bird-like mask the figure wore, as well as the piercing gray eyes behind his mask.

"Yes?" The figure spoke, his deep voice gravelly and scratchy, and seemed to echo somewhat, and Cain couldn't help but think he had seen this man before…

"What… what were you doing to that man…?" Cain asked cautiously. The figure glanced back at the man lying on the floor, his stomach sewn shut after being cut open. The figure turned back to Cain.

"Ah, yes…" He spoke, his quiet and gravelly voice echoing in the alley, "This man was an unfortunate victim of the disease… I managed to cure him before you arrived, good sir. There is no cause for alarm." The figure stated, and Cain suddenly noticed that he was eyeing his metal body parts. Suddenly realizing his predicament, Cain got into a defensive stance and prepared to take action when the figure spoke again.

"I take it you were also contained by the Foundation?"

Cain froze. This man knew about the SCP Foundation. Wait…

'Black cloak… "Disease"… bird-like mask…'

"You… you're SCP-Zero-four-nine (SCP-049)… aren't you?" Cain guessed, eyeing him warily. The Plague Doctor chuckled.

"Indeed. I imagine you were also surprised to be out of your

containment cell?" The doctor asked. Cain nodded. He'd heard of the infamous Plague Doctor from several guards from Site-17, usually talking about his "weird-ass surgery" and "obsession with the Plague", but now that he'd actually met him…

"Yes. Is this the work of another anomaly? The Chaos Insurgency?" He asked, hoping the doctor would know something. However, he shook his head, looking off to the side, "I'm afraid I do not know. Your guess would be as good as mine. However…" The doctor looked back to Cain, his cold gaze meeting Cain's curious one, "I believe I do not know your name, good sir."

Blinking twice, Cain realized that he'd neglected to introduce himself. "Ah… my apologies, I am known as SCP-Zero-seven-three (073)… although my true name is… Cain." He said, not quite used to have to introduce himself, both by his SCP designation and his actual name. To his surprise, however, the Plague Doctor's eyes seemed to brighten in familiarity.

"Ah... Cain, is it? Quite a unique name, I must say…" He said, causing Cain to narrow his eyes at him, though if the Doctor noticed, he didn't show it. The Plague Doctor then gestured behind him, beckoning to the hard-to-see shadows in the darkness of the alley. "You may come out, friend. He is one of us." He said. To Cain's surprise, a large, skinny figure walked slowly out of the darkness, stopping right beside the doctor.

He… it, whatever it was, was incredibly skinny and emaciated, as if having not eaten for quite some time. Its disproportionally long arms drooped to the floor, long fingers scraping against the ground as his equally skinny and long legs carried his thin frame. His skin was a deathly pale, and he walked rather slowly for a being as tall as he was, which was about 7"8', easily towering over both Cain and the Plague Doctor. However, the strangest thing about him was its face and head, which was for some reason completely covered by a brown paper bag over its head that masked its entire face. For some reason, he seemed more off-putting to Cain than the doctor. Speaking of which, the masked surgeon gestured to his companion.

"This fellow is regarded as SCP-Zero-nine-six (SCP-096). I found him shortly after I awoke in this place." He turned to glance at the tall

humanoid, "He also does not seem to be aware of how we arrived here."

Cain stared at the tall entity, trying to remember if he had heard of this SCP.

'Tall and emaciated… rather quiet… wearing a bag-!' Suddenly, something about the entity registered in Cain's mind. However, he still couldn't quite remember anything about this particular anomaly…

He reached toward the bag covering the humanoid's face, aiming to see if he'd recognize them. However, to his surprise, the Plague Doctor shot his arm out and gripped Cain's arm, preventing him from reaching the bag. Cain glowered at the doctor, only to feel a slight shiver down his metal spine when he saw the fierce glare emanating from the doctor's cold gray eyes.

"… Don't. This fellow is quite…" He paused, releasing Cain's arm and glancing concernedly at his companion, "… shy."

All at once, everything clicked in Cain's mind. His jaw gaped slightly at the realization.

"He's… 'The Shy Guy', correct? Zero-nine-six?" Cain asked with serious concern in his tone. The doctor nodded. "Correct. There was a… containment breach at the Foundation Site at which we alongside other anomalies were temporarily 'secured'", The doctor seemed to roll his eyes behind his white bird-like mask, "And one of the anomalies contained there managed to break free, and the entire facility entered lockdown mode. Amidst the chaos, multiple anomalies managed to breach containment and roam freely throughout the facility. Including, evidently, us." He gestured to himself and the Shy Guy before continuing, "However, during the containment breach, we unexpectedly found ourselves not in the Site, but somehow in the middle of a populated city. Seeing you here, I wonder if any others managed to find unexpected freedom from the Foundation…" The doctor explained.

Cain couldn't help but be slightly alarmed. He had heard stories about the many dangerous anomalous entities and objects contained

by the Foundation. Hell, he'd met a few of them before, and he also knew that the Plague Doctor and the Shy Guy could both still be incredibly dangerous to the human populace if desired or warranted, and they were only on the lesser end of the Euclid level. Who knew what other potentially even more dangerous entities and objects were reigning free throughout the world right now?

However, Cain's train of thought was interrupted by the Plague Doctor clearing his throat.

"Ah, yes, well then…" He began, proceeding to take a step towards Cain, holding out his glove-covered hand. "Well, seeing as how we are out of the Foundation's clutches for the moment, I do believe we should take this opportunity to embrace our newfound freedom. I do not know how we breached containment into such a populated area, but it is very likely that such an extreme stroke of luck will not happen to any of us again. Before the Foundation finds and re-contains us, I propose that we use this freedom together as much as we can before we are found again by our captors. What do you say?"

For a moment, Cain was surprised. Not even an hour after he'd awoken in the city, he'd already encountered two more humanoid SCPs, one of which seemed to wish to ally with him, at least for the time being. However, the doctor had a point; for the moment, they were all free from the Foundation. Truth be told, Cain was a bit put off by the Plague Doctor, both by his personality and... surgical tendencies… as well as a bit put off by the still-silent Shy Guy for obvious reasons, but they were all in the same boat, so to speak. He reached out and shook his hand.

"Agreed." Cain said with a small smile on his face. And somehow, he could tell the Doctor was also smiling despite not being able to see his mouth. He wasn't quite so sure about the Shy Guy, though, who kept standing there besides the doctor motionlessly. He wasn't so much scared by the Shy Guy as he simply creeped out.

"Good." The doctor said, nodding his head. Releasing his hand, he looked about their surroundings. "What do you propose we do next? I do not believe we have further business in such as populated area." The doctor stated. Cain looked down in thought.

"Hm… perhaps we should try to find a place for the night before we take any other action… it is quite late, after all." He proposed, gesturing up to the night sky. The Plague Doctor nodded in agreement, and he looked about before spotting something on the floor near Cain. Walking passed him, he bent down and picked something up before handing it to Cain. It was a slightly tattered sweater.

"I believe we must avoid scrutiny if we wish to avoid notice of the Foundation." The doctor explained as Cain examined the sweater. It was clearly old and dirty, but as much as he loathed wearing such a thing, the doctor was right: His metallic arms and spine would stick out like a sore thumb, especially in a crowded city such as this. However, he also noticed something else.

"What about your… attire? Wouldn't that draw attention as well?" Cain pointed out, already putting the sweater on. The doctor sighed, shaking his head.

"Unfortunately, I do not believe my attire can be hidden so well… no hat we could find would be sufficient in covering my face, and my attire cannot be changed. I must remain this way, I'm afraid."

Sighing, Cain finished putting the sweater on. "Alright… What about him?" Cain inquired gesturing to the Shy Guy, who continued to stare off without moving much. The Plague Doctor glanced to him and let out another, even deeper sigh. "As much as it pains me, we do not currently possess any clothing to sufficiently hide his… abnormalities. No worries, however, we can simply move about on the rooftops. It's how you were able to traverse the city until now, so it shouldn't be too difficult." He proposed. Cain nodded, and together the two climbed the pipes back up to the top of the building that Cain was previously watching from. Looking back down, Cain noticed that SCP-096 still hadn't moved from his original place, staring up at them from behind its makeshift paper bag mask. The Plague Doctor took notice and whistled.

"Come, good fellow, we must travel for the time being", As soon as he said that, the Shy Guy perked his bag-covered head up and immediately leaped straight up, landing perfectly and casually on its feet onto the rooftop with Cain and the doctor. Cain raised a brow

but didn't say anything, knowing that his eyes had seen stranger sights. Without speaking, the three humanoid anomalies turned and began traversing the city rooftops in search of a place to rest.

The Plague Doctor had some slight difficulty leaping and running from building to building like Cain and the Shy Guy due to his less well-built physique, but he managed, keeping his eyes out alongside Cain's for a place for them to spend the night without being noticed as well as any clothing to hide his and the Shy Guy's abnormal appearances

However, as they left the area, none of them were around to see the man that had been left on the floor suddenly awaken and slowly stand up. He opened his eyes, yet there were no pupils, only pure white sclera. Hearing the sounds of people, he slowly walked forward and out of the alley…

In a small clearing in the forest, a young woman that looked no older than 18 wearing a blue T-shirt and dark blue jeans rested quietly on the grass. She groggily blinked her eyes open, noticing immediately the dark moon in the sky as well as the cool night air and the trees around her.

'Huh… full moon… been a while since I last went to a forest—Wait… forest…!?'

Instantly, she sat up, eyes fully open and awake. She looked around frantically, nothing but trees, leaves and bushes around.

"What… what the hell-!?" She exclaimed, getting to her feet. Her shoulder-length blonde hair waved about as she turned her head every which way.

'Wh-What happened to… S-Site 17!?' She asked desperately in her head. Part of her wanted to be overjoyed that she was out of the Foundation Site, but at the same time, incredibly fearful of what they'd do when they found her again. An SCP going missing would undoubtedly be on top of their priority lists…

"Okay… okay… just what the f-!?"

"HEWWO!"

Immediately, she froze, and then turned around on her heels to find…

'… A blob of orange goo?' She thought in surprise as soon as she saw the thing. It was an actual living gooey blob about 3 feet wide as it lay on the grass, entirely orange in color except for its beady, pitch-black and hamster-like eyes, which was on top of its gooey mass that rose about 2 feet off the ground at max. It waved a pseudopod at her like an arm.

"Haaiii!'" The blob gurgled happily from its spot on the ground, a hole opening in its thick membrane resembling an open friendly smile. Its voice sounded very much like a child's, very high-pitched although with a gurgle effect and slight lisp due to having literally no teeth. Its voice and cheery tone overall reminded her of Kirby from the games she used to play before the Foundation took her in. Somewhat uneasily, she raised her own hand and waved nervously at the pile of goo.

"Uh… H-Hi…" She answered quietly, not quite sure how to react to it, or the situation in general.

'So, I wake up in the middle of nowhere with a talking blob… what the hell is this? Did I finally go insane?'

Her thoughts were interrupted when the orange blob started slithering (?) towards her, staring up at her with its admittedly adorable beady eyes. "Whaht's youwr name?" It asked, gurgling happily.

"… I-Iris… my name is Iris…" She shakily replied, looking down at the orange pile of goo, which was now right at her feet. Once again, the blob raised a pseudopod up in the air, waving at her again.

"Hi, Iris!" It chirped before its beady eyes began looking around at the dense growth around them. "Are we in a fowest? Yay! Trees!" It said happily, not worried in the slightest about how it had somehow teleported to the middle of a dense forest in the dark of the night, and began playfully picking up dead leaves that littered the ground

using its various pseudopods and tendrils like hands. "Ooh! This one's gween AND bwown! Here! A gift fwom me to you!" The happy goo creature chirped, eyeing a dead leaf that still had a bit of green on it and showing it to Iris, who nervously took it and examined it in her hands.

"Um… thanks?" She said, unsure of what to think as the blob suddenly went searching around in the bushes, passing over branches and sticks as it moved about while Iris pocketed the leaf. Suddenly, it gurgled joyfully.

"Ooh! A camewa!"

THAT got Iris's attention.

"Wait, what!? A camera?" She asked, astonished. Sure enough, the blob returned from inside a bush with a camera inside its sticky body, floating around in its gelatinous mass under its eyes. Iris's eyes widened to their maximum level.

"My… my camera!?" She shouted, astonished. It was her camera, a Polaroid One-step 600, the same one her parents got her years before. It seemed like such a long time since then…

Slowly, she reached out and grabbed the rather large camera from the blob's extending slimy tendril, somehow not getting any slimy residue on it (or the leaf, she would later find). Staring at it in her shaking hands, her mind raced a million miles an hour.

'H-How… F-For me to be out here is one thing, but this… h-how did it get out of containment? How did I get out of containment!?'

"Oh! Dat was your camewa?" The blob asked in confusion, its eyes sliding onto the side of its gooey mass similar to how a person might tilt their head. Iris beamed happily at it, a smile appearing on her lips.

"Y-Yes! I-It's my camera! H-How…? T-Thank you… erm…" Iris paused in her "thank you" upon having a realization. "Um… w-what's your name? Do you… do you have a name?" She asked the blob, suddenly realizing that she didn't know what to call it. The gooey

creature stared at her before chirping happily.

"W-Well, mommy didn't say a wot when I saw her, but… the scientist people call me 9-9-9!" It gurgled happily, waving its slimy pseudopods and tendrils about. Iris raised a brow in confusion.

"Mommy'…? Wait… 9-9-9?'

"Wait… you were an S.C.P too?" She asked. 999 stared at her before moving its gelatinous mass back and forth, mimicking a person nodding.

"Uh-huhm. They said I was an… ana-ano… 'anomaly'," The orange goo answered, struggling to pronounce the word and sounding a bit more solemn than usual before resuming in its usual happy tone, "and was named 'SCP-999'." It finished.

'That answers that question at least…' Iris thought, now realizing that this blob was a fellow anomaly contained by the SCP Foundation and also was somehow out in the middle of nowhere away from its usual containment.

"Anomaly"… that word left a bad taste in Iris's mouth, and for good reason. So much time spent like a prisoner, stared at by the staff and guards like a mutant animal that had to be caged, poked and prodded at by weird researchers and doctors, kept away from even seeing her family…

"Awre you okay?"

Iris hadn't even been aware that her face had turned into a scowl, and blinked her eyes to see 999 staring at her with concern. "H-Huh?" She stammered, surprised that SCP-999 had noticed her rapidly deteriorating mood. The orange blob stared at her, making a concerned humming noise.

"… Do you need a hug?" It asked suddenly, stretching out two pseudopods like embracing arms, causing Iris to step back in surprise. Before she could react, 999 suddenly flung itself from the ground and slammed its gooey mass onto Iris.

"Wha-MMPH!" Iris cried as the orange blob impacted her body,

wrapping and moving its gelatinous body and enveloping her upper body completely, causing her to inadvertently drop her camera onto the ground. However, instead of strangling her or other forms of harm like Iris was subconsciously expecting, Iris strangely felt a sense of happiness overtake her as 999 enveloped her upper body in its gooey form.

'What… what is this?' She asked herself as nonsensical feelings of joy and happiness flooded her mind.

"There! Evewyone needs a hug! Hug, hug, hug!" SCP-999 chirped happily, "hugging" Iris tightly, wrapping its body and several gooey tendrils around her back and neck, nuzzling her almost like a dog.

"H-Hey! What are you doing!? Haha! Stop!" Iris shouted, a smile appearing on her lips as she suddenly felt the lovable goo begin to hug and tickle her, laughing heartily, trying in vain to wrestle 999 off her.

"Yay! Happy! Laughing!" 999 gurgled happily, tickling Iris to no end, eventually causing her to fall onto the soft grass on her back, laughing uncontrollably.

"S-Stop, you little blob! Hahaha! I c-can't take it! Bwahahahaha!" Iris laughed hysterically, rolling on the grass-covered floor as the Tickle Monster continued to tickle her, laughing joyfully alongside her. As Iris laughed and played on the grass with the joyful orange blob, she found herself forgetting all the bad thoughts and memories that swam in her mind, now only remembering all the good in her life. Whenever anything negative appeared in her mind, SCP-999's abnormal positive feeling-inducing effects took over, leaving her with only happy sensations and thoughts, something she hadn't truly felt in a long time.

"Ahahahahahahahahahahaha! Oh, my God! Stop! Hahahaha!"

"Laugh, laugh, laugh! Yay! Kehehehehehe!"

Unfortunately, not everyone was in such good spirits that night, as could be said when Axel was dealt a winning hand by Dottie in a

card game for the umpteenth time. You might think that someone like him would be a pro at cards, but the rather inexperienced Dottie had inexplicably managed to best him at every turn. Too much for Axel to reign in his temper.

"Dammit! Sonovabitch!" He cursed aloud, slamming more money onto the table they were, much to his chagrin and Dottie's ever-growing Cheshire grin. The mohawk-sporting teen growled and stalked off out of the room into the hallway of the abandoned hotel they were staying in. Passing by the lobby, he saw Funshine hanging out with Mick near a dusty old vending machine, the older man pounding on the vending machine in a certain way and order. A few seconds later, a Coca-Cola dropped out, Mick snatching it up and opening it with a mischievous smile since Funshine already had a Mountain Dew on a nearby desk. As she drank it down, she noticed Axel stomping by.

"Lost to the little missy again, Axel?" She teased, earning a glare and a growl from the already-angered teen. Funshine scoffed. "I told you. That girl is a wizard at gambling."

Axel rolled his eyes. "Must be fuckin' beginners' luck, is all…" he muttered, not in the mood for their shit today. Tonight. Whichever it was. Suddenly, another feminine voice called out.

"Aw, relax, Axe. Not like this is the first time you've ever gotten your ass kicked in a game." Kali commented, sauntering out of a room near the beginning of the hallway adjacent to the lobby and the other hallway that Axel just stalked out of. The mohawk-sporting teen growled. "It's not just that…" He gestured to a half-eaten box of Chinese noodles, "Now I'm stuck to eating this crap again!" He shouted as he angrily kicked an empty and dusty cardboard box. Kali rolled her eyes at the display, having long ago been used to Axel's bursts of anger, as did the rest of the group.

"That's the whole point of gambling, isn't it? Taking risks and seeing if you either succeed or fail?" She retorted cheekily, much to Axel's chagrin. Putting a hand to his forehead, he took a deep breath and walked to the abandoned hotel's entrance, gently pushing the old and fragile double doors open, blinking his eyes shut and open as he did so. "I'm goin' out to see if I can find anything good… smell ya later,

ya—"

Flicker.

Axel abruptly snapped his head to the left, his eyes moving up and down the rundown city tenements that lay around the city.

"What the hell?" He nearly shouted, taking a few steps back. The rest of the gang tensed and turned their gazes towards him as he did so, their eyes full of concern. "What?" Mick asked. Axel looked up and down the left side of the road, as if trying to find something. After a few moments, he turned back to his friends. "Did, uh… did you see anything? A… flash of green?"

Funshine, Mick, Kali and Dottie, who'd walked into the room holding a large pile of dollar bills and coins, all shared confused glances. "No, we didn't see jackshit, Axel. The only 'green' you're missing is the amount Dottie stole." Mick replied, a mix of sarcasm and concern in her voice, earning a chuckle from said bow-wearing girl and a growl and a glare from Axel. He turned back to the street, then hastily shut the double doors and walked quickly back into the lobby.

"I think I'm gonna stay here and try to chill for a bit…" He muttered quietly as he walked past the others. They all looked at him curiously, but shrugged it off and went back to what they were doing. Axel rushed through the hallway he'd walked from, headed into a room he'd picked for himself since no one else was occupying the abandoned hotel, and looked around all over. He was just about to dismiss it as an imagination thing when it happened again as he turned a sharp right into a bathroom.

Flicker.

Spinning around on the soles of his shoes, he glared hard onto the barely-recognizable painted walls of the room. Seeing nothing, he repressed the urge to punch the wall and walked in the bathroom, stopping in front of the mirror and staring himself in the eyes.

"… Nah… Must've been Kali fucking with my mind again…" He grumbled, stalking out of the bathroom and plopping onto a dirty, hole-filled couch, sighing as he did so. If he had eyes on the back of

his head, he might've been able to notice the giant, green six-and-a-half foot long creature sticking to the top of the wall directly behind him, with a long stick-like segmented body suspended by a total of sixteen long yet powerful legs, eight of them on each side of the body and ending in a single long skinny claw, with a skinny long neck holding up a raptor-like head with compound fly-like eyes and a mouth filled with tiny yet serrated teeth. The most prominent feature on its body, however, was the strange orange-glowing orb on its chest

But of course, Axel did not have eyes on the back of his head, and stood up and exited the room, ignorant to the strange creature still in his room. He did, however, feel a rather strange sensation, and reflexively spun around to face his room again.

Flicker.

A green blur suddenly flashed towards the edges of his vision faster than a bullet, and he snapped his head to the right to try to glimpse whatever it was. However, whatever it was, it was out of sight. With an irritated grunt, he stormed out of the room and towards the lobby.

"Kali! I told you to stay the fuck out of my mind!"

As he did so, he once again was ignorant to the green, insectoid creature standing upside down on its sixteen legs on the ceiling, staring emotionlessly at his retreating figure. It watched him disappear into the lobby. Then, the Peripheral Jumper did what it did best.

It jumped.

Flicker.

Benjamin awoke with a start. He sat up and breathed in and out repeatedly, running a hand through his unkempt and rather spiky hair. Panting hard, he looked about wildly. Now, he'd seen many weird things during his escape from the breached Foundation Site, but nothing prepared him for waking up in the middle of the night out in the middle of nowhere. He also noticed as he looked around that he was apparently lying on a large rock in a field of wheat from

the looks of it. There were forest trees everywhere on the edges of the field, and at first he was pretty damn confused. Wasn't he just about to escape the Foundation-?

'Wait… I'm away from the Site. I'm away from the Foundation…'

Suddenly, confusion was replaced by immense joy. Still sitting on the rather gargantuan rock, Benjamin let an almost disturbingly wide smile grace his features, and he stared up at the night sky in pure bliss.

'I… I made it… God, I dunno how the fuck I did it… but…'

"I… I got out! I'm free! I'M FREE! YES! FUCK YOU, 05's! FUCK YOU GUARDS! FUCK YOU, SCPs! I DID IT! YEAH!" Ben shouted at the top of his lungs. He didn't really care that he was somehow out in the middle of nowhere; all that mattered to him was that "out in the middle of nowhere" was clearly far away from the Foundation Site where he had suffered so much. Far away from the horrible creatures, sickening sights and overall horrifying experience that probably would've driven most people insane. Right now, all he could think about was how he had finally made it against all odds, and nothing was going to ruin his good mood now.

"Grraaagh…"

… Too soon?

That deep, gutteral and just plain evil-sounding voice made him freeze in place, a look of terror overtaking his features. Suddenly, he realized that the giant rock he was sitting on… didn't really feel like a rock. His eyes widened in terror, and felt a cold chill run down his back. Still staring upwards and not looking down at what he was sitting on, Ben felt with his hands exactly what he'd awoken on.

"Grrraah… what…?" An incredibly deep, ancient and malevolent voice beneath him growled. Suddenly, Ben felt the object he was sitting on move, and he finally looked down to see what he was currently seated on. When he did, his heart sank in a now-familiar sensation of dread. He was not sitting on a rock.

He was sitting on a giant monster lying on the grass. It was enormous, at least 60 feet long from the tip of its long tail to its stout nose, and 12 feet wide. Even lying down with its body touching the ground, the top of its back was at least twenty feet up from the floor. Its body seemed somewhat reptilian, like a giant lizard, except it had six long pillar-like legs shaped like those of an elephant, with the feet of a crocodile with extended toes and claws, the front pair of feet resembling a cross of crocodile feet with human fingers. Instead of scales, it had a tough and thick dark greenish-skin, and a large mane of hair drooped from its back and neck that was long enough to reach midway down its sides, with a row of spikes protruding from its spine and shoulders from the middle of its short neck to its tail, which ended in one such long spike. The top part of its head seemed to be covered in a bony, skull-like armor, with the lower jaw resembling the rest of its body. Its head itself seemed to resemble a crocodile, only shorter in length and thicker, large saliva-covered teeth portruding from its cold lips. On top of its reptilian skull-like head were four large, hateful eyes, each with a burning yellow sclera and bright red irises and pupils.

Eyes that, right now, were glaring holes straight into Benjamin Oliver Walker after the monster awoke from Ben's joyous cries and prompted it to turn its head around to see the comparatively tiny human sitting on its back.

Ben blinked.

SCP-682 blinked.

An instant later, petrified screams and furious roars destroyed the calm night air, terrifying any and all forest animals unfortunate enough to be anywhere near the sources of the sounds.

"'Sup, guys."

"Hey, Dustin."

"Morning."

"Hey."

"… Uh, so… Did you guys happen to hear any weird sounds last night?"

"…"

"…"

"… I… I think so…"

"You sure, Will?"

"I mean… it sounded pretty far off in the woods."

"I'm pretty sure I didn't hear anything, Dustin."

"Seriously? I could've sworn I heard people laughing and screaming out there last night. I thought I heard an animal roaring, but…"

"…"

"… Maybe… I mean, weirder stuff's happened, heh… right guys?"

"Oh, God knows the things we've seen, Mike. Geez, there's no way things could possibly get any weirder from this point on!"

"… Did you seriously just say that, Lucas?"

"… Shit."

3. Exploring and Living

Here we are, another chapter!

Again, like I said in the previous chapter as this is my first story on , I apologize if I can't totally capture everyone's personalities, but I'll try my best!

As we've seen so far, multiple SCPs have now appeared in and/or around the area of Hawkins, Indiana, along with our favorite D-Class personnel escapee! Just as a refresher, they are:

SCP-076: Abel.

SCP-049: The Plague Doctor.

SCP-096: The Shy Guy.

SCP-073: Cain.

SCP-735: The Insult Box.

SCP-040: Evolution's Child.

SCP-105: Iris.

SCP-372: The Peripheral Jumper

SCP-682: The Hard-to-Destroy Reptile.

SCP-999: The Tickle Monster.

D-9341: Benjamin Oliver Walker.

I may or may not add more (currently leaning towards "not add more" at the moment), but these are the SCPs that will be starred for now alongside the main cast of Stranger Things whom we all know and love, or at least, we should know because spoilers are gonna be everywhere in this story.

Thanks to the main SCP Foundation wiki, historical/

geographical records and various Stranger Things episodes for info on the setting and characters!

"What place do you think would suffice?" Cain asked over his shoulder as he landed on another rooftop, The Plague Doctor and the Shy Guy right behind him.

"Possibly… an abandoned building… would be able to… meet our needs." The doctor replied in between jumps. As luck would have it, they found such a place a few minutes later. Stopping on top of a bank across the street, it appeared to be an abandoned hotel; about 5 stories tall and quite dilapidated if the several broken windows were any sign. The doctor and Cain looked around, spotting no one around and carefully leapt to the ground, the Shy Guy following suit after looking around longer than the other two.

"Oof…" The doctor muttered upon landing, his hand on the ground with his knees bent. Seeing the concerned look on Cain's face, he got up and brushed himself off. "My apologies, I am not used to such physical activity." He explained. Cain nodded, and they quietly crossed the street. They had managed to hurry to the hotel's entrance, which was a barely stable double-door, with red paint peeling off of it. Pushing his hand carefully against the door, Cain gently pushed it open, barely managing not to knock it down.

Stepping into the lobby, he and the Plague Doctor could both notice how run-down the place was; dust and garbage littered the floor, and the remaining furniture was, for the most part, knocked over and/or broken apart. The main desk was obviously empty, and it was completely dark with only the moonlight flitting through the (mostly) broken windows that provided any real light. Just a few steps in, the doctor looked like he was about to say something when the Shy Guy turned his bag-masked head towards him and apparently whispered something in his unseen ear. Cain raised a brow at the exchange, unable to hear what was being said.

"… Yes… this will do nicely." The doctor stated, Cain nodding his agreement. Walking carefully through the garbage and broken debris, they made it to one of the hallways that were adjacent to the lobby desk. Peering through the darkness, they found many rooms in the

halls, along with an elevator near the hallway's entrance. Most normal people might've been deathly afraid or at least unnerved by the setting, but then again, none of the three of them were remotely normal. A creepy hotel was nothing compared to the other anomalies regularly contained by their captors. Looking around, Cain suddenly spotted a rather large pile of clothes on the floor near one of the intact couches, mostly winter pants and jackets with a few beanie hats, top hats and even a sombrero. Sifting through the pile, he beckoned to SCP-096.

"Here." He said, handing the humanoid a large black jacket with a hoodie, and long grey pants. Slowly and without a word, the Shy Guy took the clothes and, with some difficulty, put on the clothes given to him. When he finished, both the Plague Doctor and Cain could agree that he looked ridiculous, the pants barely even reaching to his knees and the jacket hanging loosely off his thin frame, as well as the jacket sleeves only reaching midway to his elbows. Cain somewhat nervously reached over and flipped the hood of the jacket over, covering his head. Combining the hood with the way that SCP-096 normally walked and stood with his head drooped and facing the ground, someone would have to be standing right in front of the Shy Guy to notice the paper bag still on his head, let alone his face. Cain glanced to SCP-049, who shrugged.

"It will do for now." The doctor said simply. Turning back to the hallway, Cain was about to suggest they simply break into one of the rooms when a loud, somewhat obnoxious voice called from the hallway on the other side of the lobby.

"HEY! The hell are you doing here?"

Turning about, both anomalies faced the source of the voice to see a young man standing in the entrance of the hallway on the other side of the lobby, his face covered in mascara and a rather ridiculous mohawk on his otherwise shaved head as well as a choker around his neck. Cain stiffened, yet stayed calm.

"Hello… me and…" He paused for a second to glance at the doctor and ridiculously-clothed Shy Guy, "… my friends here are just looking for a place to stay the night. We don't to trouble you—"

"Alright, look…" the young man interrupted, glaring at them, "I don't give a shit what you say you're reason is. All that matters…" He gestured to the area around them, "is that you bozos are in our turf." He stated. Cain raised a brow.

"Really? 'Your' turf?" He asked. The young man laughed haughtily, and spread his arms out. As he did so, several more people appeared from the dark hallway behind him: Two young women, one with dark skin and thick hair wearing a green jacket, and one with light skin with a bow in her hair, and an incredibly large balding man towering above the rest.

"Yes… Our turf." The teen proclaimed as his allies walked beside him, facing the anomalies as one. While the Shy Guy didn't react and the Plague Doctor merely gazed at them coldly, Cain visibly tensed even further, the situation reminding him very much of the incident that had gotten him noticed by the Foundation in the first place back in New York. It didn't help that these people seemed to be gang members much like those who had tried in futility to kill him back in New York as well.

"Surely we can come to a compromise." The Plague Doctor's deep and gravelly voice spoke out, his cold gaze staying on the man who had threatened them just now, causing him to glare back.

"Huh? Oh, sorry, didn't realize it was Halloween, already, old man." The first man retorted as he started to slowly approach the SCPs, his friends following close behind. "Yeah, nice mask, that's *really* scary. Got me quaking just looking at it." The dark-skinned woman taunted, voice laced with sarcasm, though the doctor didn't react in any way.

"Y'know, I've already had it with freaks like you just busting into our hideouts and thinking they can just get away with it. That, and I'm just pissed as shit, so, here's my compromise: You get the hell outta here…" The mohawk man then took out and brandished a switchblade, and was clearly experienced in using it, "Or we throw your bodies out onto the street."

Now Cain was really getting nervous, although not because he was intimidated. Far from it, the guards at Site-17 were far scarier than any of these hoodlums. However, he feared that should things

escalate, it would end up exactly like how he'd first been found by the Foundation: Gang members assaulting him, only to be accidentally killed by his curse. He still kept a calm face, however, once the four gang members were standing mere feet away.

"I'm sorry, but there's no other option… we'll just stay in one of the other rooms for tonight only and be out of your hair come sunrise." Cain attempted to negotiate. The man, however, laughed, as did his comrades save for the large man.

"Wow! 'Sunrise'? Where do you think you are, buddy?" The man taunted, waving his switchblade threateningly, "Well, I'm assuming that's gonna be a 'no', then." He continued. Cain furrowed his brows. He tried to extend a friendly hand to him.

"Look, it's just one—" However, he was caught off-guard when the hoodlum suddenly swung his switchblade at his right arm, giving Cain no time to react, and the blade struck his right underarm, slashing through his sleeves. However, much to the shock of his friends, the mohawk-sporting hoodlum suddenly cried out in pain, clutching his own right arm and clenching his teeth. Blood spurted from a wound that seemed to appear from nowhere on his underarm. Cain, on the other hand, had no scars or marks of any kind on his own arm.

"Axel! T-The hell!?" The bow-wearing girl shouted, her and her friends immediately tensing and entering a defensive position. The newly dubbed 'Axel' bent over slightly, fixated on his injury. "The fuck… the fuck did you do!?" Axel screamed at the SCPs, stepping away slightly. The entire time, 096 hadn't reacted to anything at all, simply standing there and staring at what was in front of him. It was both unnerving and slightly irritating to both Cain and the gang of hoodlums they were facing, whether they might admit it or not.

"Please, calm down." The Plague Doctor held his hands to them in a peaceful gesture, causing Axel to stare at him incredulously. "'Calm down'!? The fuck!? What kinda freaks are you!?" He shouted, too focused on his injury as well as too hysterical to notice the doctor slowly reaching into a pouch on his belt. The other gang members moved up to Axel's side, getting right up to the anomalies.

"The hell you want, a fight? Cuz we can give you one…" The large man proclaimed, tensing his shoulders as if getting ready for a brawl. Cain was about to try to diffuse the situation once more when he suddenly heard a creaking noise from above him. He looked up just in time to see a large piece of debris falling from the ceiling, and he managed to leap backwards just as it came crashing down on the floor where he once stood. Then, from the debris, a large cobra suddenly slithered onto the floor, hissing loudly and approaching the doctor. "Be careful, fellows!" He warned his allies. To his confusion, however, the Plague Doctor and the Shy Guy both stared at him like he had just grown another head, seemingly unaware of the snake hissing at their feet, ready to strike. Axel and his allies seemed confused for a second, but then grinned and even laughed somewhat, as if they just had a realization.

"Oh, you're screwed now, pal! You better back off!" Axel yelled, approaching them with his blade again. However, the doctor just sighed, and slowly raised his hand from his pouch. "I said…" He paused, and then in the blink of an eye, he thrust his arm forwards, and a syringe suddenly flew from his palm and lodged itself onto Axel's neck, shocking both him and everyone else in the lobby, "… Calm. Down." The Plague Doctor stated, his gravelly voice seeming much deadlier and serious now. After a few moments of stunned silence, Axel suddenly fell over onto the floor, unconscious. Silence reigned for several more seconds before all hell broke loose.

"THE FUCK DID YOU DO!?" The large man shouted, staring with wide eyes at Axel's unconscious form, the two girls getting tensing and getting ready to fight. Already Cain could see the green jacket-wearing girl reaching into her pocket, no doubt for a weapon. Suddenly, he looked down and saw that the cobra was baring its fangs, ready to strike the Doctor, and without thinking he lunged forwards and grabbed the snake by its neck and wrangled it in his hands, holding tightly as it desperately thrashed about.

"Doctor! Help me!" He shouted, trying to avoid the snake's thrashing body. However, just like before, the Plague Doctor was staring at him weirdly. "Er, Cain? Are you… alright?"

Now it was Cain's turn to stare, while still wrangling with the cobra in his hands. "What-WHAT DO YOU MEAN!? Do you not see that I

am currently trying to fend off a serpent!?" He shouted frantically. Usually he was much calmer in these situations, but the chilling memories combined with the overall absurdity going on made him lose his cool. The doctor and Shy Guy kept staring at him before apparently coming to a realization, humming to himself as he turned around to face the hoodlums.

"Ah. So, you too have anomalous properties…" He muttered, staring off at the other hallway. Everyone suddenly stopped what they were doing, except the cobra that continued thrashing about. Lowering his head slightly, the doctor's cold gaze suddenly seemed to take on a much more menacing look, glaring straight ahead. "I suggest you reveal yourself, and there will be no need for further violence. We do not wish for a confrontation, and are willing to negotiate amicably."

For a few moments, nothing happened. Then, to Cain's astonishment, the snake he was trying to handle abruptly vanished, causing him to blink rapidly in confusion. A feminine voice with a somewhat thick accent spoke from the dark hallway across from them.

"Negotiate, you say?"

Out from the darkness, a teenage girl stepped out, no older than 15 by the looks of her. Like her comrades, she was dressed like a gang member/hoodlum, her hair dyed purple with a bit of mascara on her eyes. And like the doctor, her cold eyes sent a glare that seemed a bit intimidating for someone her age. "You came into our hideout, hurt one of our own and expect to walk out of here unscathed?"

"We did not intend to start a confrontation. Me and my…" The doctor paused to glance at Cain, "… friend were only looking for a place to rest until morning. I can provide your friend with medical aid, if you wish." He reasoned. The girl raised a brow at him.

"'Medical aid'? What are you, some witch doctor? Are you a freak like your friend?"

"As a matter of fact, I am a doctor. And although these injuries are not usually my area of expertise, it is still my duty to aid those in need of medical assistance." The doctor offered. The girl stared at him with a poker face, the doctor doing the same. Finally, she spoke.

"Who the hell are you two?" She half-asked and half-demanded. Cain and the Plague Doctor glanced at each other before Cain spoke up.

"My name is Cain. And this is—"

"You simply call me 'Doctor'. This is…" He interrupted, gesturing to the Shy Guy and earning a slight glare from Cain, "… The 'Shy Guy', as some call him, or Zero-Nine-Six, if you wish…" The Doctor explained, causing Cain to furrow his brows a bit at him. However, the girl's eyes widened.

"… A number designation…?" She asked quietly, causing her allies to pause in their tracks. Cain mentally face palmed, having believed that the Plague Doctor might've already given them away. However, the doctor didn't seem fazed.

"Yes. We both have number designations. I reiterate, we will leave when morning comes and you will never have to meet with us again." He looked down at the unconscious Axel. "Before I treat your friend, may we please receive your names? We've told you ours… it's only fair if we know yours." The doctor asked, seemingly unafraid. The hoodlums seemed hesitant before the girl with a bow in her hair spoke up.

"Dottie." She said somewhat nervously yet strangely chipper voice. Then, the dark-skinned girl spoke, followed by the big man.

"Mick."

"Funshine."

Finally, only the girl with purple hair remained. She stared expressionlessly at the anomalies before she finally answered as well. "Kali. You already know Axel… crazy nut…" She muttered, gesturing to the man still unconscious on the floor. "So… you gonna help him?" She said. The Doctor nodded, and walked over and took a knee by Axel, reaching into a cloak and retrieving a roll of bandages. "So… how did you do that?" She asked, facing Cain. Cain raised a brow. "Do wha-?"

"Don't bother lying. You hurt Axel without even touching him. He cut

you, yet he's the one that got cut." Kali pressed, taking several tentative steps forwards. Cain inwardly flinched. He'd hoped that wouldn't have been brought to attention… then again, why wouldn't it have? He contemplated telling them the truth.

'How would they believe me? They would immediately alert the authorities… then again, they appear as though they are also running from the law as well… either way, it won't negatively impact us in the long run.' He reasoned in his mind. Finally, he answered.

"… Would you believe me if I said I were cursed?" He asked. Immediately, Kali's eyes widened, as well as her friends. "Cursed? Like someone put a spell over you or some shit?" Mick asked with skepticism in her tone. Even the Plague Doctor gave Cain a scrutinizing look from the corner of his vision as he treated Axel's injury.

"… Something like that, yes. Should someone attempt to harm me in any way, directly or indirectly, they themselves will be inflicted with the intended damage instead." He explained, the memories not happy ones. To his surprise, though, they didn't seem too skeptical of his story. It could be that they saw proof in the form of Axel attempting to cut Cain, but…

"And… you?" Kali asked the doctor, getting him to look up at her as he worked, "Do you have any… strange abilities as well?" She pointed a questioning finger at him. He paused, and then answered.

"Yes. I am able to cure any and all ailments and diseases that plague mankind. Well…" He looked off to the side, "One of them in particular is my specialty…" He looked back to Kali, "But yes. Any disease, any illness, I am able to cure without issue."

"Huh…" Dottie commented, "So what about Mister Shy Guy? Any reason you're wearing a weird bag on your big ol' head?" She asked him, attempting to peer into his face behind his mask. Cain averted his gaze to the right. "Oh… let's just say he hates people seeing his face." He stated. The others tossed scrutinizing glances at him. "Why? Some accident?" Dottie pressed on, walking right up to the Shy Guy, who still didn't react or move in any way. Cain stepped up beside Dottie and the Shy Guy and held up his hands. "REALLY long story!

Please trust me when I say simply to not look at his face! Please!" He warned her. Dottie raised a brow at him but walked off anyway back to her group. Turning back, she gave a half-mocking half-happy smile.

"So, you're a bunch of freaks then, right? Just like little miss Jane-!" She was silenced by Mick throwing a hand over her mouth. Cain raised his own brow but said nothing. Just then, the Plague Doctor stood up, having wrapped up Axel's arm with a roll of bandages.

"There. Your friend has been treated." He explained. Turning to the group, he nodded. "Do not fear, I have only rendered him unconscious using a dosage of diazepam, and will be fine upon his awakening." He elaborated. Kali and the others stared at him skeptically. "Really? Diaz-diarrhea-die-whatever the hell that is?" Mick asked, stumbling to say the word properly. The doctor gestured to the sleeping teen.

"If you do not believe me, feel for his pulse." He suggested. Funshine did just that, walking nervously passed the masked surgeon and crouching down near Axel, putting his finger on his wrist. After a few moments, the man nodded. "Yeah, he's fine… sleeping like a damn baby, but fine. Hopefully, he'll stop raving on about that thing he says he keeps seeing…" He confirmed, muttering the last part just loud enough for Cain to hear, and picked Axel up in his strong arms and carried him over into the hallway that he appeared from. Kali then turned her cold gaze to the doctor and the other two anomalies.

"So… what is it you want here?" She asked, still tense and ready to take immediate action. Cain stepped forward. "We came here looking for a place to stay. We had no intention of a violent confrontation." He gestured to the empty hallway behind them. "We'll simply stay for the night, and leave come morning without any further interaction between us. Fair?" He asked, not wanting for any further violence. Kali stared at him before turning away and walking back into the adjacent hallway where she'd walked from.

"Touch anymore of our group, and you'll be the ones needing severe 'treatment'." She stated coldly without looking back at him, disappearing into the dark shadows. Her friends stayed for a few seconds before leaving as well, Mick in particular giving them a nasty

glare of warning. Cain and the other anomalies waited until they left to turn back and walk into the adjacent hallway.

"So… which one of these rooms shall suffice?" Cain asked nervously. SCP-049 seemed to be in the middle of the thought process when the Shy Guy once again leaned in and whispered quietly in the doctor's ear. After a few moments, the doctor nodded.

"Yes." He then pointed to a room in the middle of the hallway, on the right ahead of a part of the floor that seemed somewhat unstable. "That room will do."

Cain didn't say anything but nodded in agreement, the three of them walking down to the door that Zero-Four-Nine seemed to point out. The doctor approached first, carefully gripping the doorknob and pushing the door open. Holding it open, he allowed SCP-096 to lumber into the room first, still looking ridiculous in its terribly-fitting clothes. As Cain stepped inside, he instantly noticed the near-pitch black lighting, almost infinite amount of dust and overall rundown appearance of the room. At least it was a roof over their heads, though. While Cain was still looking around the room, SCP-049 wordlessly walked over to a dust-covered chair, brushed as much of the offending substance off as he could, and then quietly sat down, clasped his hands together onto his lap and leaned his head down onto his chest, closing his eyes. Cain raised a brow, and sensing his question, the Plague Doctor glanced up at him.

"We will need to get as much rest as possible, for I assume that we will be expending quite a bit of energy tomorrow." He said, then lowered his head back down and closed his eyes, presumably drifting off to sleep. Looking around, Cain realized that the Shy Guy was already hunched over in a corner, his face still instinctively facing away from the other two anomalies and hugging his knees as he sat noiselessly on the ground. Fending off the unease at being in the same room as these two rather disturbing entities, Cain simply laid down onto the dirty bed without bothering to use the even filthier blankets. Before he realized it, he had already drifted off to sleep.

Unbeknownst to Cain, Plague Doctor or the Shy Guy, there was yet another mysterious entity besides them in the hotel.

On the incredibly high ceiling of the lobby, where no one had once looked during the entire excursion, two bug-like compound eyes stared emotionlessly down, watching the two groups' confrontation. Long claws on the ends of sixteen mantis-like legs clung to the rounded-out ceiling, giving the creature an excellent view of the area bellow it.

The Peripheral Jumper looked on excitedly as tensions between the two parties seemed to rise, especially when the teen wielding a knife seemed to get cut while trying to slice the man wearing the dirty sweater. It had to resist the urge to screech and growl in excitement, since it was the same human it had been tormenti—er, following for the past few hours. Unfortunately for SCP-372, the situation settled down when the purple-haired girl apparently worked out some compromise with the hooded figure. Not that the Peripheral Jumper seemed to care, all the more victims to stalk and-.

Wait.

Its fly-like eyes suddenly focused and widened upon seeing the tall, slouched and incredibly thin figure that hadn't really been participating at all in the altercation, doing nothing almost like it didn't care. However, now that the Jumper had focused its senses on the figure, it realized that it had seen this humanoid before. Yes, in the room of glass that it had spent so much time trapped in…

Flicker.

With blinding speed and precision that no one else noticed it, Three-Seven-Two dashed down the round walls and sped off into the hallway that the hooded figure and mask-wearing entity had been about to enter before the confrontation started. Quickly entering through one of the already-open doors at the very end of the hallway, it paused inside the dark and barren room, its long and thin prehensile tail waving about behind its green centipede-like segmented body.

So… if he was here… were the hooded figure and sweater-wearing entity also loose from their captors? Who else was free?

All of a sudden, the Peripheral Jumpers' blood began racing through

its long body in excitement, pumping faster and faster, and its reptilian jaws began opening and closing rapidly, trying not to make any noise to give away its position yet unable to contain its rapidly-building excitement. If there were others on the loose, that meant more subjects. More targets. More victims. More prey.

Flicker.

"Can I get a damn break, please!? Just ONCE!?"

Once again, Benjamin found himself running for his life. Instead of the usual Sculpture or Shy Guy like he had in the facility, though, he was running from a much, much bigger threat than ever before.

"WRAAAAUUWGHW!"

The Hard-to-Destroy Reptile roared hatefully somewhere behind him, its enormous footsteps causing the ground to slightly tremble as Ben raced through the dark foliage, darting passed trees and rocks under the moonlit sky in an attempt to escape the giant beast.

'Just my fucking luck to run into mini-Godzilla right after I finally escape!' Ben cursed mentally as he gritted his teeth. He knew he couldn't keep running forever, though. He needed to find a hiding place.

Looking about wildly for any place that might help, he spotted the familiar lights of a town off in the distance away, and he stopped cold in his tracks. It had been a long time since he'd seen a town. Or anywhere outside the Foundation Site, really. As focused as he wanted to be in that moment since Six-Eight-Two was still right on his tail, Benjamin couldn't help but feel entranced by the foreign feelings of warmth and… how would he describe it… not alone…?

'S-So… that's what it all looks like, huh…? Are… are there answers to…?'

"GRWOOOAAAAAWRGH!"

His thoughts were broken when Six-Eight-Two's familiar hate-filled bellowing reached his ears. He spun around behind himself to see, off

in the distance, trees and rocks being flung into the sky by the monster, which itself was unseen due to the dense trees and foliage in the way, as well as the darkness that the night casted. However, Ben had already seen firsthand what the Keter-level beast looked like not even half an hour ago, and knew that he had to keep running. He looked back to the sleepy town, and prepared to dash for it, but something stopped him from immediately rushing over.

'If I do this… no, I don't give a damn what happens to them, I need to… h-he'll destroy everything…' Ben mentally battled in his mind, knowing that if he fled to the town, SCP-682 would no doubt follow him and level the entire town to the ground before morning came. On the other hand, though, he really did not want to die…

"… Fuck…" He muttered, then lunged to the side and ran in a different direction than the town, shouting all the way.

"Hey! Can't catch me, you overgrown [REDACTED] gecko!" He taunted it, the beast's furious roars and changing footsteps indicating that SCP-682 had fully heard him and was now changing direction get right back on his tail, causing Ben to immediately curse himself for risking his neck once again.

'Those damn people have no idea what the hell I just saved them all from!' He cursed mentally as he charged through the foliage, panic beginning to settle in since he was just now starting to get tired. This, of course, meant that the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile would be able to more easily catch and devour him unless he found somewhere to hide or escape to ASAP. Out of nowhere, Ben suddenly saw a flash of pink and blue from a nearby swath of low-standing trees, and felt a large mass slam into him.

"Oof!" He grunted, feeling the wind get knocked out of him by whatever just hit him and getting sent flying through the air. However, instead of the leafy forest floor, he felt his rear and legs land on… a furry animal?

"Wait, what the hell!?" Ben shouted, realizing that he was now riding on the back of… something. It looked like a strange hybrid of a bear, salamander and a squirrel, covered in blue and pink fur. Even more surprising was the fact that, ahead of him, on the creature's

shoulders, was a little girl wearing an orange sweater and purple pants, no older than 10 years old. Even stranger, the fact that she seemed to be enjoying the ride on this bizarre animal.

"Yay! Go, Mowie!" She shouted into the breeze as the large creature tore through the forest underbrush while effortlessly carrying the both of them on its muscular back. Just as Ben was about to start swearing once more in confusion, the girl turned to look over her shoulder at him, unintentionally startling him by revealing two differing eyes colored green and yellow respectively, with her yellow eye having a black sclera, indicating that her yellow eye was blind.

"Hi, mister! Don't worry, we'll get away from that big bad monster! There's no way he can catch up to Mr. Mowie!" She cheered, the wind somehow not whipping her bright pink hair around. Ben could only stare at her in absolute confusion and awe, his eyes wide open and his mouth slightly agape at the sheer absurdity of the situation . It was only until he heard SCP-682's angry roars behind them did he snap back to reality, gasping as he realized that he was still riding on 'Mr. Mowie' alongside a strange girl. Usually, he'd be spouting all kinds of questions regarding this entire situation, but right now he was primarily focused on living and not dying a horrible death at the hands of his giant and angry pursuer.

Looking over his shoulder as he gripped Mr. Mowie's fur to keep from possibly falling off, he noticed that they were traveling much faster than he was by foot, and while he could still easily hear the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile's roar and feel its rapid stomps shaking the ground, it was clear that Mr. Mowie was outpacing SCP-682 by some margin. What margin it was exactly, Ben did not care, as long as they were getting away from the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile. Relieved, he allowed himself a slight second to relax before immediately turning back to his apparent savior riding ahead of him.

"Uh… just who the hell are you?" Ben tried to keep himself from shouting into the wind, his utter confusion returning in full force. Looking over her shoulder, the multi-colored-eyed girl gave him a cheeky smile.

"I'm Emily!" She cried happily, apparently not caring that they were riding on an animal running faster than a car, "And this is Mr.

Mowie!"

'Mr. Mowie' grunted in agreement as he sped between the trees, being careful not to drop Emily as she rode on his shoulders. Ben, on the other hand, seemed to be having a somewhat rougher ride, having to hold on to the thick fur on Mr. Mowie's back to avoid falling off. Suddenly, Emily pointed to the left of Ben's head.

"Oh! And that's Poofa! There you are!" Emily cheered. Ben raised an eyebrow in confusion, until he looked to his left and noticed the large, round, bug-like thing floating in the air right next to him, its long tentacles drooping under it as its sacs repeatedly inflated and deflated to keep moving.

"GAH! THE HELL!?" Ben couldn't help but scream in surprise, leaning back and almost falling off Mr. Mowie's back. Barely regaining his composure, he almost didn't hear Emily giggling in amusement.

"Oh, don't be scared, silly! Poofa won't hurt anyone! Isn't that right?" Evolution's Child asked, bouncing as Mr. Mowie bounded across the ground and rolling its shoulders as a result. In response, Poofa made a strange noise somewhat similar to a balloon deflating, except higher in pitch and quicker, apparently agreeing with Emily. While Ben was still struggling to comprehend everything, Emily seemed to notice his orange D-Class jumpsuit for the first time, gasping as she did so.

"Ah! You're one of the nice Foundation men! Are you going to take us home?" She asked almost innocently, but most of what she said went unnoticed by Benjamin, who suddenly went pale.

'Foundation...'

'She… She recognized my uniform… she's heard of the Foundation… so, then…?'

Ben's mind seemingly went blank, looking straight ahead without actually paying attention to anything at all. Emily cocked her head to the side in confusion, unaware of the effect that a single word had done.

"Um… Mr. Scientist-Worker person…? Hello?" She called behind herself to him, waving an arm in the air. To her relief, it seemed to do the trick, seeing as how Ben suddenly blinked rapidly, shaking his head somewhat and managing to get back to reality.

"H-Huh? Wha-?" He tried to say, but at that moment, several things happened, seemingly in slow motion. First, Mr. Mowie charged through several bushes and came across a large log in their path. Since he was still in full running mode, he bent low mid-stride and took off, jumping four feet directly into the air and above the log. However, he had evidently failed to notice the tree literally right next to it, and sailed right under a low-hanging branch as he jumped over the fallen log. Thanks to her low height, Emily also passed harmlessly under the branch, and Poofa just hovered above it. However, since Benjamin was significantly taller and older than Emily, he ended up getting smacked directly in the face and forehead, hard enough that he was forcefully pushed back and ended up falling back and right off Mr. Mowie's still-airborne body, landing on the back of his head on the cold, hard ground.

Thud!

"MR. SCIENTIST-WORKER PERSON!" Emily cried, evidently not yet knowing what to call him, pulling on the fur on Mr. Mowie's neck and bringing him to a halt like a horse. Jumping off his powerful shoulders, she landed on her feet and rushed to Ben's downed form, standing over his body nervously.

Judging by how still he was lying yet was clearly still breathing thanks to the rising and falling of his chest, Ben was knocked out cold. Not quite knowing what to do, Emily fidgeted, the adrenaline rush from riding on Mr. Mowie's back beginning to wear off and the cold night air starting to affect her. Looking around her surroundings, Emily was starting to get seriously worried. She'd seen what people looked like when they were in serious medical trouble, and needless to say, she did not like it.

She was on the verge of full-on panicking until she turned to her left and saw what looked to be some sort of scientific facility about two hundred feet from her. Walking slowly up to it and squinting her eyes to see better, it was pretty big, yet also seemed strangely deserted.

"H-Hawkins… National Laboratory?" Emily read aloud nervously, using the reading lessons that Dr. Habernathy and Logan had taught her during her stay with them. Looking around, she saw nobody else in sight, which wasn't very far due to how dark the night was. Fidgeting more than before, and thinking of nothing else, she motioned to Mr. Mowie.

"U-Um… M-Mr. Mowie! Can you bring the Scientist-Doctor-Worker person to this shelter please?" She asked him. With a mix of a bark and a grunt, he gently grabbed Ben's shoulder in his blunt teeth and dragged his unconscious form carefully onto the dirt road leading to the abandoned lab. Luckily, the 9-foot tall gates were left slightly ajar by whoever had been here last, and Emily carefully opened them while Mr. Mowie dragged him to the lab's entrance. They made it to the front double doors, which were obviously locked and required a card to be scanned by a card-scanner on the wall. Emily stared up at the doors, pondering how to get in, until her sleeve began vibrating, causing her to look down at it.

"Huh? You have an idea, Flozzle?" She apparently asked it. In response, her entire shirt suddenly gained green stripes in a plaid pattern before vanishing to the usual orange color. Apparently, this meant 'yes'. Flozzle vibrated and made several churning sounds before going silent and still.

"Yay! Good thinking!" She congratulated it, raising her sleeve to a card-scanner on the wall. Suddenly, the cloth on her sleeve grew outwards towards the reader and shapeshifted the ends of the 'cloth' into a card-shape, changing colors to match an actual ID card. Emily scanned it, and to her joy, a light *beep!* buzzed through the wall, accepting it. The doors automatically opened, and Poofa, seemingly having enough of Ben being dragged around like a rag doll, graciously reached down with her tentacle-like limbs and picked up his still form, depositing him on Mr. Mowie's back to move him better.

"Whoo! We did it! We… oh…" Emily quickly quieted down upon seeing the dreary and dark interior of the laboratory, clearly abandoned and left to rot by whoever once worked here. It did remind her of the Site hallways and rooms whenever Dr. Logan or Izawa would take her out of her room to walk around and see

somewhere that's not where she and her friends live, which wasn't much, although here it was definitely a lot creepier due to the lack of life and activity.

Grunting, Mr. Mowie meandered into the dark and decrepit main lobby of the lab, sniffing and growling at the gloomy atmosphere. Emily clung close to his stocky legs, clutching his thick fur like a lifeline as the group traversed through the dark facility. Occasionally, they came across a cockroach or a rat that either Mr. Mowie or Poofa would scare away from Emily, but that was it.

"Uh… H-Hello?" Emily called out nervously, fearfully keeping close to Mr. Mowie's thick frame as they walked down a particularly spooky hallway, which, like the rest of the laboratory, was almost pitch-dark due to the majority of the lights not working. Poofa hovered just above them, her tentacle-like limbs splayed out almost like a protective cage over Emily, Mr. Mowie and the unconscious Ben. Eventually, the group came across one room that had working lights, which seemed to be an office of sorts. There were several chairs in the room, although they were strewn about and some on the floor, along with a wooden desk with a swiveling chair right next to it. There appeared to be papers scattered across the floor, one of which Emily picked up and read with squinted eyes.

"Huh… 'gates'… 'hostile growth'… 'electromagnetic waves'… boooring!" She finally shouted and tossed the papers aside, having enough of reading. Whilst she did so, Poofa carried Ben off Mr. Mowie's backs and set him down carefully on the wooden desk, which was just big enough to act as a makeshift bed. Seeing this, Emily yawned, the adrenaline from rushing through the woods beginning to dial down. Sensing that she would fall asleep soon, Mr. Mowie laid down onto his side with his stomach exposed and barked, catching Emily's attention. At the same time, Poofa sank down near the ground, landing on Mr. Mowie's chest.

"Hm? Oh, thank you!" Emily said happily, eagerly hopping into Mr. Mowie's furry stomach and laying down as the large creature curled its long, furry tail up to act as a blanket for Emily. On the other hand, Emily laid her head down onto Poofa, seemingly using her as a pillow. Then, Poofa strangely began to emit what sounded almost like a lullaby, soft tunes and gentle pitches echoing quietly from the top

and center of her bulbous body.

"Okay… good night, Mr. Mowie… good night, Poofa… and good night, Flozzle…"

In response, Mr. Mowie let out a friendly gruff, Poofa paused momentarily to wrap her tentacles around Emily in a hug, and Emily's own shirt vibrated once softly. Combining all of this, Emily's eyes began to flutter, and she was soon fast asleep. Almost as one, Mr. Mowie, Poofa and Flozzle all instantaneously fell asleep as well, ceasing their movements and laying still around Evolution's Child.

None of them noticed Benjamin's still form twitch and stir briefly on the cold, lonely desk.

The next morning

Iris woke up peacefully, fluttering her eyes open. Reaching an arm up to rub the sleep from her eyes, she realized that she couldn't actually move her arm. Startled and fully awake, she moved her head up and saw a familiar blob of orange goo resting peacefully on her body, its gelatinous mass weighing her down, and she suddenly remembered what had happened.

'Wha—oh, that's right… SCP-999…' She remembered, recalling what had happened the previous night. Seeing that her upper body was inadvertently pinned by the Tickle Monster, she tried to 'wake' it up.

"Um… excuse me? Nine-Nine-Nine?" She nervously asked. To her relief, SCP-999's familiar voice replied.

"Hmm?" It gurgled, jiggling its mass before apparently realizing where it was. "Hi, Iris!" It greeted her casually, waving a gooey orange tendril at her. Iris would've waved if she could have.

"H-Hi… uh, look, can you… can you please get off me?" She asked politely, slightly unnerved by the fact that she was talking to a living blob. She realized that, as an SCP, she probably shouldn't have been taken aback by it considering the other oddities she'd seen, but nothing about this entire situation was normal to begin with, what

with her and the Tickle Monster somehow on the loose. Speaking of which, the gooey blob seemed to recognize her wish and slipped quietly off, leaving no residue on Iris' clothes.

"There! Good morning!" SCP-999 chirped joyfully, still not apparently worried about… anything, really, Iris realized as she shakily stood up on the forest floor. Looking up, she could see the Sun's light pouring through the tree line, indicating that it was daytime.

"How long were we out here…?" She asked more to herself than her gooey companion, moving a hand to her eyes to shield the sunlight, partially taken aback by its brightness.

'How long have I spent in that hell?' She thought as she looked around, spotting her camera lying on the ground. As she bent over to pick it up, she suddenly realized something.

She had absolutely no idea where she was.

'What forest is this? Are we in China? Canada?' She asked herself in a mild panic, looking around the trees as if it might somehow give her a clue. The two SCPs were in a warm, sunny forest, obviously, but they had no idea where in the world that forest was located.

"Hey! Just where do you think-?" She tried to ask her gooey companion, but was cut off by the sight of it happily chasing a butterfly around a maple tree.

"Hi! Happy bug! Happy wings! Yay!" It gurgled cheerfully, waving its pseudopods endlessly and happily as it chased the butterfly around the tree. Iris couldn't help but sweat drop at the Tickle Monster's complete lack of concern over the situation. She was starting to get the idea that the gooey ball was totally incapable of genuinely worrying over anything.

"Ooookay…" Iris muttered quietly, putting the camera strap around her shoulder to carry it more easily, and found herself surprised by how natural yet foreign it felt after not being in contact with it for so long. Getting over her initial feelings, she turned and decided to try to find where to go.

'So… the Sun rises from the east and goes west… the Sun's to my left… north is that way… that means south is…' She tracked mentally, trying to figure out her directions. Eventually, she found out where west was, and decided to head west, turning to her right and started walking. Apparently, the Tickle Monster noticed her leaving, and gave up pursuing the butterfly and slithered across the grass to catch up to Iris.

"Hey! Wait for meee!" It gurgled excitedly, clearly not wanting to be left alone. Iris raised an eyebrow but didn't object, deciding that it would make a good travelling companion thanks to its overwhelming positivity. At the very least, she wouldn't be alone.

'Wait… is he a 'he' or a 'she'?' Iris suddenly asked herself, questioning SCP-999's gender, '… it sounds like a boy… I think… oh, screw it, I'll think about it later'…' She finally decided, her own thoughts beginning to frustrate her. Thankfully, the sun was warm enough to keep them both comfortable, and provided plenty of light. Walking through the tree-filled landscape, a soft feeling of serenity fell between the two anomalous entities, something that the Tickle Monster paid no heed to since it was full of bubbly energy to begin with, innocently playing with fallen leaves and branches that it came across in its path.

Iris, however, continued rubbernecking like a tourist. Site-17, along with almost everything to do with the SCP Foundation in general, seemed so lonely, cold, gloomy… dark. However, the forest seemed to be the exact opposite; she was still the only human being around with no one to talk to but the Tickle Monster, of course, but the air was warm, and the Sun shone its beautiful golden rays down onto the earth below, the crunching sound of dead leaves seeming much more welcome and natural than the sounds of weary shoe soles against the cold metal floors of the Foundation's Sites. Iris was so caught up in her whirring emotions and thoughts that she stumbled on an obstacle in her way.

"Woah!" She suddenly cried as she felt her foot come loose on something and lurched forwards. Luckily, SCP-999 had been paying attention, and immediately rushed forwards and caught Iris in its warm and slimy body and saving her from landing onto the hard ground. Bouncing slightly on the Tickle Monster's gelatinous body,

Iris allowed herself to breathe in and out to calm down.

"Phew…" She muttered, looking underneath herself at SCP-999, "Thanks…"

The Tickle Monster gurgled happily. "Of couwse! Anything foh my fwiend!" The blob replied, its childish, high-pitched voice slightly hampered by its gooey anatomy.

"Wow...you got quick reflexes for—" Iris was cut off when she turned around.

At that moment, Iris's face went pale and immediately shut up upon glimpsing the ground behind them. Because, the thing that had apparently caused Iris to trip in the first place, was a gigantic footprint, easily larger than monster truck tire, with three toes and seeming vaguely reptilian, like a crocodile. More still, there was a large trail of them. Now that Iris took the time to actually look around, she'd only now realized that half of the trees in the area had been toppled over and crushed, evidently by whatever had left these tracks in the first place. She felt a shiver down her spine.

"Shit… just what the hell left these?" Iris muttered nervously as she got back up on her own two feet, looking in directions that the footprints had come from and were now headed, just in case the thing that left them was still nearby. It almost reminded her of one of those cheesy dinosaur movies she'd seen as a child… although now, Iris got the feeling that whatever left these prints was much bigger and more frightening than any T. Rex or Spinosaurus. She didn't even bother denying it as being a hoax or a joke by local kids, since her time in the Foundation taught her that literally anything is possible. All the while, Nine-Nine-Nine watched the tracks. Iris was too busy worrying to tell, but the Tickle Monster seemed more… somber… than usual. It was watching the giant footprints intensely and in a rather focused manner, which seemed unusual for the normally chipper blob.

"… Nope." Iris finally decided, turning and walking in the direction she and SCP-999 were originally travelling in and being subsequently followed by said blob, "I am NOT getting involved in that… whatever THAT is…" She muttered firmly. She was not about to let whatever

left those gargantuan footprints kill and/or eat her so soon after waking up outside her usual containment cell.

This was not about to be one of those cheesy slasher flicks where everyone goes *towards* the source of terror and gets killed in the first five minutes!

Still, now Iris was alert and tense, nervous of running afoul into whatever monster had rampaged through the forest. Thanks to her time with Pandora's Box, she had learned how to accurately paint a picture of a scene after it already happened. And unfortunately, what she gathered wasn't very pretty: The toppled and crushed trees indicated that whatever left the tracks was evidently pissed off or, if not, at the very least filled with adrenaline, and the large space between the individual footprints implied that it was running at a surprisingly fast pace for something its size.

So, that probably meant that either A) it was being chased by something – and whatever could scare a beast that big must've been extra bad news for Iris - or the far more logical conclusion and the one Iris chose to believe, B) whatever left these tracks was chasing something or someone else through these woods, tearing down and destroying anything and everything in its path. While answer B was infinitely more plausible, it was still bad news for Iris either way. And as much as she admittedly enjoyed her new companion, it was obvious that the Tickle Monster would be almost useless if they had to defend themselves.

Speaking of which, Iris had only now noticed how quiet SCP-999 had been since they found the trail of footprints. However, given that she herself was shaken by their discovery, she didn't bother to talk about it out loud, instead thinking hard to try to find any answers to their predicament.

'Obviously, we're in the middle of nowhere, and there's some giant animal… monster… thing out here that'll more than likely try to eat both of us if it finds us. And we somehow ended up here outside our… cells, without remembering how…'

The more she thought, Iris' face gradually turned into a scowl to the lack of answers she was getting; only finding more questions.

Obviously, the Foundation didn't just up and decide to let her go free, otherwise they would've erased all her memories of the Foundation, and even if they didn't, they sure as hell wouldn't have left another anomaly literally right there by her side. Plus, she woke up in the middle of an empty forest. Why not just drop her off at home-?

'H-H… H-Home!'

Suddenly, Iris' eyes flew open, jerking her head up in shock as her mind almost froze, nearly stumbling again because of how fast her body spontaneously stopped mid-stride. She didn't even remotely care or even notice that, though. All she was focused on were a few particular thoughts.

"C-Can I… go home…?" Iris shakily asked herself in a quiet voice that she herself barely even heard. By this point, the Tickle Monster had noticed her sudden change in behavior, and was now staring up at her in confusion and slight concern. Not that Iris really noticed, too caught up in her million-miles-an-hour thoughts speeding through her head. After spending four years in that same, empty white cell since she was fourteen, and already failing to get home once even after Dantensen had done his absolute best to get her as far as the airport, the notion of returning home to see her family and friends had all but vanished under a cloud of despair and depression. If only the damn flight had taken two minutes less to take off…

She stared down at her camera, her eyes focusing rather intensely.

'I'm… I'm free, right now…'

She then stared at the forest ahead, the Sun's rays suddenly seeming a bit brighter. Iris suddenly started walking forwards again, although with a bit more speed and energy, her boots pounding against the leaf-littered ground harder than before, and Nine-Nine-Nine was so caught off guard that it initially struggled to slither after her and catch up. After a few seconds, the orange ball of goo managed to finally find words.

"Um… where are gowwing?" It gurgled, though it didn't seem like it was going to leave her regardless of the answer. Iris didn't take her eyes off the horizon for a moment, nearly surprising herself with how

confident her own voice sounded.

"… Home. We're going home."

"Can you guys hurry the hell up!?" Mike called over his shoulder as he ran down the hallway, nearly pushing over other students in his rush. Dustin and Lucas panted as they tried to keep up, with Will behind them in a leisurely jog. Scoffing at his friends, Mike reached his locker, stopping in his tracks as he hurriedly moved through his belongings. Lucas caught up first.

"Dude, can you chill!? It's like she's going anywhere!" He pointed out, getting an eye-roll from Mike in response. Dustin and Will stopped next to them, the former out of breath and the other seemingly just fine. Will spoke up, "Sheesh. I knew you really liked El, Mike, but can you please not get an aneurysm before we see her?"

Mike stopped and looked him dead in the eye. "I'm not making her wait any longer than I need to." He stated in a serious tone, causing Dustin to throw his arms up in a gesture of giving up.

"Uh, dude, I think she can afford to wait for us! Don't you thi-!" He was cut off.

"NO!" Mike shouted, causing Dustin and Lucas to flinch, "I promised her it would be exactly 3:15! I need to be there on time!" He shouted. Will, to their relative surprise, just shrugged, apparently understanding of his friend's behavior despite not even formally meeting Eleven yet. He just turned and sifted through his locker.

"Just try not to get any cramps. Last time I checked, we were proud nerds, not athletes." He pointed out calmly, trying not to start an argument. Mike grunted in mild annoyance, though it was obvious that he wasn't truly irritated as he closed his locker shut and adjusted the straps on his backpack, turning and walking swiftly down the hallway with purpose and determination. Lucas, Dustin and Will looked with various reactions, Lucas in particular seeming a bit miffed at his friend's antics.

"Geez, you'd think we'd all be calm and happy after all this…" He

muttered, putting his hand to his forehead. Suddenly, a feminine yet tough voice called them.

"Geez, you'd think you'd be following your own philosophy." The three of them turned to see Max sauntering over, a teasing smirk on her face. Lucas raised an eyebrow, returning the smirk.

"Oh, so NOW who's a stalker?" He teased, getting a playful punch in the shoulder in return, eliciting a few chuckles from their friends. Dustin looked between Max and Lucas with a grin.

"So, you guys still on for the arcade tonight?" H asked. Max opened her mouth, but Lucas spoke up next, cutting her off.

"Yup! I've been practicing and studying the codes, and I'm about to wreck everyone's high score this time! And I do mean…" He grinned challengingly at Max, "Everybody."

Max placed a hand on her hip. "Well, someone sounds confident. Guess I'll have to rub your failure in twice as much when we're done." She challenged. Will took the opportunity to input his own two cents.

"Eh, as long as you guys keep your hands on the joysticks and not anywhere else." He teased, causing Max and Lucas to feel their faces flush, turning away from each other while Dustin broke into laughter, not caring about the stares he received from other students.

"Hah! Got 'em! Nice!" He jeered, patting Will on the shoulder, embracing the glares from his other friends. Lucas gave Dustin a deadpan stare.

"What about you and Steve? You guys seemed awfully close out of nowhere a couple days ago when we had to catch Dart." He retorted. Dustin immediately stopped laughing.

"Hey! Me and Steve are just close buddies! He's helped me a lot over the course of our manly friendship!" He replied, trying and not exactly succeeding in looking intimidating. Lucas wasn't buying it.

"Really? What'd he do, give you advice on how to make your hair stick straight up like a mountaintop?" He mocked. Dustin was about to retort, but Will stepped in between them, sticking his arms out to

separate them.

"Hey, can we not follow Mike's example and just stay calm? I don't know about you, but I kinda want some peace and quiet around here for a change." He interjected. Lucas and Dustin looked at each other, then to Will, then back at each other before shrugging their shoulders.

"Alright, fine." Dustin calmly replied, reaching into his locker for his Nougat, "I gotta clean out Yurtle's tank, anyway." He explained, his friends noticing the somewhat somber tone he used. However, they didn't say anything about it, knowing the situation behind it.

"Alrighty then…" Max spoke up, facing Lucas, "Ready to lose?" She asked tauntingly. Lucas crossed his arms in an attempt to look cool. Max resisted the urge to roll her eyes. It had only been two days after Eleven had forced the Gate to close, and Hopper had stubbornly refused to let anyone see her since she had apparently collapsed from exhaustion from her duel against the Mind Flayer. She was there to see Mike desperately plea with the Police Chief, but the man stood firm as a boulder. On the plus side, the whole thing at least did confirm to her that Mike wasn't a total jerk like she'd first thought. Just a lovesick, emo puppy.

Luckily, now that El was back, she could finally see him as the dorky and caring dweeb that Dustin and Lucas had tried to describe to her when they first met.

"Could ask the same for you, dweeb." Max retorted easily, causing Lucas to give in to his temptation and roll his eyes and walk down the hallway, with Max following after and leaving Dustin and Will behind near their lockers. Will couldn't help but notice the still-somber look on Dustin's face as he watched them go. Sensing his friend's plight, Will placed a hand on his shoulder, getting Dustin to turn to him in confusion.

"Hey", Will spoke softly, "At least they're both happy. Isn't that what you would've wanted?" He asked. Dustin glanced at Max and Lucas walking away side-by-side, and then sighed to himself.

"Yeah…" He admitted. Will gave him a gentle smile. "There. Now

c'mon, my mom's gonna freak if I'm home a few minutes late. She was kinda freaked out by those weird noises last night, remember?" He reminded him, eliciting a groan from Dustin as they left as well.

"Ugh, we get attacked by an interdimensional monster twice and everyone's suddenly on the alert for an alien invasion every time we hear something weird in the woods." He remarked sarcastically and tiredly, and Will had to suppress the urge to laugh out loud at Dustin's antics. Some things never change, he supposed.

"What the hell are we gonna do about those freaks?"

The question seemed so obvious, yet difficult. Funshine sat in a rather poorly-fitting chair in one of the abandoned hotel rooms, just across from Dottie, who was looting one of the drawers that they hadn't gotten to yet. Between them, Axel lay in a somewhat clean bed, still unconscious from being tranquilized by SCP-049. Outside, in the hallway, Mick was conversing with Kali. Or at least, it could be called that if it weren't for the fact that the former was struggling to keep her voice down.

"They don't appear to wish us any harm, Mick… if they wanted to fight, they would've done so by now." Kali refuted, running a hand down her tired face. The group had managed to get an uneasy sleep after their altercation with Cain, the Plague Doctor and the Shy Guy. Mick had approached Kali early about how to deal with them while Funshine and Dottie kept an eye on Axel. Speaking of which, the large-haired woman rolled her eyes at Kali's calm tone.

"Kali, I dunno if you saw, but that weird-haired freak cut Axel by doing literally nothing, and the witch doctor just knocked him out with that diarrhea-diazzapa-whatever the hell it was that he just conveniently had, all because of some 'curse' or spell or whatever." Mick argued, easily recalling the night before, taking a glance at the other hallway adjacent to theirs across the lobby where the anomalous entities where staying. Kali followed her line of sight and sighed.

"Mick, I don't know if *you* noticed, but Axel started that whole fight to begin with. Besides, I think he needed a bit of extra sleep if he

keeps shouting about seeing a monster in the corner of his vision, don't you?" Kali retorted, recalling how Axel had just suddenly stormed into the lobby and accused her of making him hallucinate a lightning-quick green monster the previous day, causing an argument that escalated rather quickly. "Why are you talking to me about this, anyway?" Kali asked. Mick suddenly seemed to stiffen, folding her arms tensely in a rather defensive way.

"I dunno… I mean… they're mostly freaks, kinda like you, no offense…" She answered somewhat nervously. Kali narrowed her eyes at the older woman.

"Is there something you're not telling me?" She accused. Mick's eyes widened only slightly, but enough for Kali to notice. "Hm, that's what I thought. Now, out with it." She ordered. Mick might've been older, but she knew better than to try to square up to Kali. Reluctantly, she sighed, averting her gaze.

"I mean, I was just thinking… you think… you think they might have something to do with your… 'sister'…?" She finally answered. Kali's eyes widened. She'd pondered over the origins of their temporary new neighbors all night, but she had never come to that conclusion. Obviously, she came to the conclusion that they had also at one point gotten involved with the government's typical "hiding-secret-experiments" code of things, but she had never came to the conclusion that the three strangers might have also had something to do with Jane.

"I mean… y'know, they're all freaks and have number codes and—"

"I got it." Kali interrupted, silencing her. Now, her cynical mind was running at a thousand miles per hour. Closing her eyes to think, she tried to make sense of everything. It was clear that Cain, the Plague Doctor and their 'shy' friend were all involved in some government conspiracy, like herself and Jane. Or El, as she said she'd been called. However, it wasn't clear exactly what they were involved in… or who might be looking for them.

Then again, it seemed that whoever they'd escaped from wasn't also after Kali and her group. For one, unlike Cain and his allies, she actually remembered Eleven from her time with Project MKUltra, and

probably would've remembered Cain or the other two entities had they been involved. Secondly, throughout their quest for vengeance against the scientists of Hawkins National Laboratory, she'd never once seen or heard any mention or implications of experiments or subjects like the Plague Doctor or his supposed comrades from neither the supposed scientists that they killed nor any documents that they happened upon. And there were a *lot* of them.

At that moment, they heard one of the doors from the adjacent hallway open, and both Kali and Mick turned to see the Shy Guy, Plague Doctor and Cain appear from one of the hotel rooms. While the Plague Doctor and Shy Guy seemed relatively fine (which was only a guess considering that both of their faces were covered by a mask and paper bag respectively), Cain seemed exhausted with bags under his eyes. At the same time, though, Kali couldn't help but notice that Cain still walked and acted just fine, as if he was already used to sleepless nights. Kali was so deep in her thoughts that she almost didn't notice Cain walking over to her. Almost.

"Well…" He started off somewhat awkwardly, somewhat nervous of her tough and hardened appearance and mood, "It is sunrise. As per our agreement, we will be leaving now." He paused, and to Kali's surprise, reached a hand out towards her for her to shake. "We wish you the best of luck."

Now Kali really was thrown for a loop. Normally, most people on the run would've snuck off without them knowing, and even if they didn't most simply would've left without a word to anyone else. However, this Middle Eastern man whom they attempted to attack the night before was apparently saying goodbye as though they were somehow close. It seemed… off, so someone on the move to be so kind and polite, and to a total stranger no less.

"… The same goes to you." Kali answered, shaking his hand firmly, "I suppose I should thank you for not killing Axel when you could have… he was already beginning to be a loose cannon as it was, and he likely would've blown up if something drastic hadn't happened." She continued somewhat nervously, not quite used to this sort of exchange. Cain didn't seem to mind, only smiling kindly.

"Of course." He paused to glance at the Plague Doctor and the Shy

Guy, who were waiting patiently near the double doors of the abandoned hotel, "I know that we are a rather… strange bunch, but we aren't violent… at least, we try not to be." He trailed off, seeming a bit… regretful?

Cain shook his head. "Ah, sorry, I am afraid that we have overstayed our welcome. Farewell, Kali." He said as he turned away and began walking to rejoin the other two anomalous entities, his polite tone seeming so foreign to someone as cold and hardened as Kali. Behind her, Funshine and Dottie poked their heads through the door of their room, and they, alongside Mick, were listening intently to their conversation. Kali, however, couldn't help but ask one last question.

"Do you know where you're going?" She found herself blurting out, causing Cain to stop and look over his shoulder, an eyebrow raised. "Pardon?" He asked in mild confusion. Kali, who could feel her friend's eyes drilling into her back, decided she may as well go through with her curiosity.

"Do you know where you are heading after this? Are there any destinations you are trying to reach?" She asked tentatively. Cain, who seemed to now understand, opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out for a few seconds. He glanced back at his allies, who didn't respond.

"… No, I don't believe so…" He finally replied, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment, "We… we find ourselves in a rather… strange predicament, I suppose you could say… and we are currently trying to find answers to this mutual problem, or at the very least, a safe place where we may remain… ahem, under the radar, so to speak." He finished, choosing his words very carefully. Kali stared with a deadpan expression.

"You're running from a secret organization, aren't you?" She decided to just come out with it, knowing that if she hadn't she might have never known. That, and it was just plain obvious to her. Cain's eyes opened in surprise.

"W-What? Where did you-?" He stuttered, then realized that there was probably no point in lying. Averting his gaze somewhat, he nodded.

"Yes… there are some who might wish us harm, or at the very least would want to strip us of our newfound freedom if they were to find us again. They… they aren't aware of our freedom just yet, but we are trying to find shelter where they may not find and re-contain us." He explained, not mentioning the SCP Foundation by name so as to make sure that Kali and her group were not put in danger. Well, not in any more danger than they probably already were judging by their "tough-street-gang" demeanor, and the fact that Kali herself was anomalous in her ability to create illusions, but he knew firsthand how vicious the Foundation could and would be in order to contain their 'specimens'. Surprisingly, Kali seemed to readily accept this new information, tossing it back and forth in her head.

"… So… you don't know where you are going?" She asked carefully, to which Cain gave a slow nod. Thinking it over, she opened her mouth again.

"… Have you ever heard of Hawkins?" She asked him again. Cain perked up, his interest obviously piqued. "Well… yes, I have but… isn't it a rather quiet town?" He replied. Kali nodded.

"Exactly. Last I heard, it is apparently a very quiet and easy-going area… doesn't that sound like a good place to lay low?" She pressed, knowing that she had Cain's full attention. Pressing further, she finished, "And besides, I… I know someone there… someone who just might be able to help you."

"Someone who can… help us? Are you certain?" Cain asked carefully, knowing to tread lightly here, "How exactly can they help us?" He asked. Kali's expression turned soft, and if one looked carefully – which Cain did – also rather remorseful.

"… Let's just say that she would understand your situation to a... certain extent." She elaborated rather vaguely, "At the very least, she definitely wouldn't give you away to anyone pursuing you… as long as you are willing to defend both the safety of her and yourselves at the same time, of course." Kali didn't know why she continued talking. It was clear that they were complete strangers and likely wouldn't meet ever again, yet she couldn't help but feel a sort of kinship to the three strange entities, particularly relating to Cain.

She understood perfectly what it was like to constantly be on the run from government agents and the authorities just because they weren't considered normal in the eyes of society and the government. Humans tended to fear that which they don't understand… a curse that seemed to plague more people out there than Kali initially realized.

"And… how do you know she will help us?" Cain asked. It sounded a bit too good to be true in his mind, just hearing about someone who would understand how he and his newfound allies felt and would lend them aid and support. Kali crossed her arms and tapped her foot impatiently.

"She's… like us. You know…", She gestured to Cain and then herself, "Not normal… She has special abilities, like you and me. She's… she's only a child, but we've been through similar experiences, so… yeah, she lives in Hawkins, which is fairly nearby. There should be a bus headed there in about an hour, so you'd better catch it."

Cain nodded, but couldn't help but to ask one last question regarding this person, "Ah. And… just, what might 'her' name be?" He asked. Kali felt silent for a few seconds.

"… Eleven. She publicly goes by Jane Ives, though, from last I heard… she's currently under care of the Chief of Police of Hawkins, who will also be a possible aid to you, so they should be relatively easy to find so long as you don't stir up trouble for him or the authorities." She answered, the underlying warning clear to Cain: Don't attract the attention of the authorities and/or the government, and if you do, you'd better protect her and not drag her down with you if everything goes to hell. Luckily, Cain easily understood, and got the implication that Kali was rather close to this 'Eleven/Jane Ives' person. To what extent, he couldn't discern, but he understood and could relate easily enough.

"Alright… Eleven, Jane Ives, Hawkins, Chief of Police…" He muttered, going over the various names he had just received before nodding and bowing slightly, "Thank you tremendously. We will not forget this favor you have done us, Kali. If there's anything we may be able to aid you with in the future, do not hesitate to attempt to contact us." He thanked. Kali shrugged casually, though it was clear

that there were many emotions and thoughts racing inside her mind. Nodding again, Cain turned and was about to walk to rejoin his allies when he glanced over his shoulder.

"Oh, before we depart… may I ask, just how do you know this 'Eleven' person?" He asked in a slightly nervous tone. Kali's eyes widened a bit in surprise, before returning to their usual neutral look.

"Ah, yes, about that…", the tiniest traces of a proud smile appeared on her lips, "She's my sister."

As was usual, the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile was angry. However, as was not the norm, it wasn't that angry. At least, when compared to its normal anger. In fact, compared to its usual state, it was actually pretty relaxed. Yes, it was still a bit grumpy, but that was only because the human that had appeared sitting on its back in the forest when it awoke had managed to elude and escape the beast's hungry jaws.

Thick acidic saliva dropped rom rows of large incisors and into sizzling puddles on the ground as its enormous feet pounded the ground as it walked, leaving enormous footprints and crushed trees and boulders in its wake as he trudged on, the bright and colorful scenery beginning to wear on his nerves. However, the beast managed to keep itself together, know that it was now free from the Foundation. It did not know how it managed to wind up laying in a field with a D-Class personnel resting on its enormous back, but, to be frank, it did not matter to him how he managed to get there. And while it had frustrated him that the offending human somehow managed to escape, he knew that such a feculent waste of flesh like a human would never pose a threat to it nor was really worth getting all that upset about to begin with.

All SCP-682 cared about was that it was free to do whatever it pleased. And it would gladly do just that.

"Humans must be getting even faster… as they should be…" It muttered under its smoky and putrid breath, its dark and somewhat garbled voice seeming to shake and intoxicate the air itself as it knocked down yet another tree merely by nudging its enormous jaws

against it too hard, crushing it into splinters beneath its massive feet. As it moved, the natural wildlife apparently knew; any deer within a football field's range would immediately turn and move off, squirrels and chipmunks would dive into their homes and abandon any nuts and acorns, and birds within a mile radius would immediately stop singing and fly away, unlikely to return. Even the many, many insects and arachnids, such as mosquitoes, ants, centipedes and spiders that would normally show no fear to other animals all scurried away upon Six-Eight-Two coming within 200 feet, seemingly aware of exactly what had appeared in their forest.

Not that any of it mattered to SCP-682, who continued to stomp through the forest. At one point during the chase with the D-Class human the previous night, it could have sworn to have smelled a small society, perhaps a town, of humans nearby, but it had been too distracted by his taunts and overall worthless existence to investigate. So, as much as he hated to admit it, the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile was lost.

Better than the Foundation, though, it quickly discovered as its spike-covered tail knocked down several more trees and slashed across the ground like a giant rake, its pillar-like legs and gargantuan feet obliterating large rocks and animal dens that had the terrible misfortune to be in its path.

"Aaaargh!"

Suddenly, the giant beast stopped in its tracks, right before its front pair of feet would have crushed yet another innocent foal sleeping in a bush. Was that what it thought it was? It turned its head on his enormous shoulders towards the source, trying to hear the sound again. It had been incredibly faint, and obviously was far off in the distance, but…

"Yaaargh! Kutyhafhuryastan!"

'… Ah, yes… there's not mistake… him…' Its ancient mind tossed about, recognizing those enraged battle cries from anywhere. To even further prove his suspicions, several cleanly cut tree trunks and piles of earth could be seen flying in the air above the treeline, though only the giant beast's ancient and well-trained eyes would've been

able to properly make them out from this distance. His malicious eyes glinted, and he suppressed the urge to grin at this new turn of events. Slowly turning his enormous girth to face the source of the sound, the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile began walking slowly towards the enraged shouts and cries, feeling excitement building up in his cold veins as he grew closer and closer.

'It has been quite some time… this should allow me to blow off some steam for now… Abel…'

("COME ON! I'M BARELY EVEN WINDED HERE! I'M SURPRISED THAT ANY SHEEP WOULD FOLLOW A [REDACTED] SACK OF [REDACTED] LIKE YOU!")

If there was one thing Abel despised more than anything else… well, except for that person… it was this infernal, damned and wretched box. For literally all night, he had tried his absolute best to rip, tear, slash and hack into the offensive and unholy cube to no avail, all while it continued to somehow read into his past and taunt him with some of his most personal secrets and inner demons that were better left buried away.

All of it now culminated to this moment, which consisted of Abel on one knee on the ground, using a pitch-black katana to hold up his absolutely exhausted body, gritting his teeth in pure frustration in front of a single grey-colored metal box. All around them, there was nothing within a hundred-foot radius. Beyond that, it was hard to tell it was a forest anymore, due to the many piles of cleanly-chopped trees, equally cleanly-cut tree stumps, the bloody and gory remains of what used to be deer, wolves and birds, and the thousands upon thousands of slash marks in the ground. Only about one-hundred-and-fifty feet away from the two entities were there any normal signs of life. Speaking of 'life', never before has Abel ever wished to end one like he did towards this one damned cube.

("H-How… ARE YOU STILL ALIVE, YOU DAMNED ACCURSED CUUUBE!?") Abel roared with what little energy he had left. He hadn't even noticed that it was now daytime until the infernal box had pointed out how much time he was wasting in one of his earlier taunts. Throughout his many battles and kills, he never once thought

that he would ever feel as much hatred as he did for him against someone else…

… how very wrong he now was.

("Obviously, you were only meant to belong in a sheep's pen and nowhere else, you ugly old [REDACTED]") SCP-735 jeered at him in perfect Sumerian. If it had a face, it most certainly would've had an arrogant smirk the entire time, reveling in 076's torment. Without a moment's hesitation, Abel raced up to it and grabbed it, lifting it off the ground in shaky hands, gritting his teeth together so hard it was a miracle that they didn't shatter like glass.

("S-Shut… the hell… UUUUPPP!")

With that, the ancient warrior slammed the box down as hard as he could, followed by repeatedly jumping up and kicking down on top of it with both feet. It almost resembled a toddler throwing a tantrum over a defective toy, except instead of a toy it was a mind-reading box with record-breaking insults, and instead of a little kid it was a full-grown Middle Eastern man wearing robes and wielding pitch-black blades.

("HA! IS THAT- *BLAM!* -ALL YOU CAN- *BLAM!* - DO, YOU- *BLAM!* - WORTHLESS FOSSIL!?") The Insult Box hollered in-between Abel's powerful and deadly kicks and stomps. Abel's rage only increased, but now he was beginning to tire out from spending literally all night trying to destroy a single sentient cube. Eventually, after what felt like hours, Abel's exhausted legs buckled, causing him to slip and fall over onto his sweaty back on the withered ground. Upon feeling his back collide harshly with solid earth, Abel gasped, the wind utterly knocked out of him and too exhausted to immediately get back up. As the back of his head struck the ground along with the rest of his body, Abel felt the searing pain in the back of his head, grunting and being forced to focus on the pain. As he did so, he suddenly became aware of just what he was doing: Wasting his time on a single damned telepathic box. Suddenly, Abel's mind cleared, and was brought back to his senses as he lay exhausted on the torn soil. SCP-735 was as energetic as ever, though.

("Wwwwooooooowwww… I'm REALLY shaking in my boots right

now! Speaking of which, can you even afford boots, you old hobo —?") He jabbed on and on, to the point that Abel was sure that he was going to lose his mind. Slowly and shakily getting back onto his feet while the Insult Box continued to drone on and on about his clear lack of money and personal belongings, Abel's withered eyes took in the sight of the destroyed and ruined land. Now that his mind was too tired to stay very angry and was in a slightly more relaxed place, he also realized that he'd totally forgotten to take his surroundings into account.

"All this… in so little time… How-?" He was cut off by Seven-Three-Five's incessant ranting.

"Oh, speaking English now, are we? How the hell did you even learn it, you big hairy monkey—"

"ENOUGH!" Abel shouted, having decided what to do. Lifting the infernal cube in both hands, he began swinging around in a circle, rapidly gaining speed and velocity, until at least he let go and used the momentum to send the Insult Box soaring far, far away.

"HEYI'MNOTDONEWITHYOUYASACKOFPIIIIISSSss…!" It screamed as it flew into the distance, its infinitely grating voice shrinking as it did so. Panting and growling, Abel stood shaking as he glared at the general area where the box had headed. After making sure that he could indeed no longer hear SCP-735's deafening insults, he allowed himself to breathe easier, slowly relaxing and dropping to his knees in sheer exhaustion.

"Graaah… haaah… finally… wretched cube…" Abel muttered to himself. On the one hand, he felt proud that he'd finally gotten over his rage and dealt with that horrid cube. On the other hand, he felt ashamed that he'd let a damn BOX get to him so bad and make him waste an entire night trying to slice him a new one. A true warrior shouldn't let something so… so… trivial mask his senses… especially in a place so full of life and-.

Wait… just where was he, anyway?

Abel suddenly perked his head up, suddenly aware of a predicament that he'd been facing since last night but had yet to directly confront.

'Where… where am I?' He asked in his mind's eye. Last time he'd been aware, his… containment chamber… was deep underwater at the bottom of some trench. So, unless the Foundation was trying to grow trees thousands of feet beneath the surface, that meant that Abel and his tomb had both somehow been whisked into the middle of a forest.

Or, at least, what was left of it, considering the damage that Abel was unwittingly caused in his quest to destroy a foul-mouthed metal box. With a tired groan, he slowly got up and examined his surroundings, this time with a much more relaxed manner. Barring the decimated landscape, most humans probably wouldn't have been able to discern much. However, Abel was, by no means, 'most humans'.

Bending low to the ground, he carefully examined the soil and what grass was still leftover.

"Hmm… Pteridophytes… Cottontail Rabbit, Coyote, Fox Squirrel… Mink… Opposum…" He uttered as he examined the ground for clues, using his knack for animals to guide him. Eventually, his eyes widened.

"Wait… how have I ended up in Indiana…!?" He asked aloud, astonished. Then, however, he merely shook his head. "No, it does not matter… it is not the chains and restraints of the Foundation… anything is better than that foul disgrace to the Earth!"

With that, he quickly turned and glared at the sky, specifically to the Sun. After measuring its angle, brightness and position, he quickly came to multiple conclusions.

"… 3 hours and 10 minutes after midday… 10 degrees Celcius… east, west…"

Eventually, after thinking enough, Abel rasied his arms and blades straight up and, on cue, two small and pitch-black vortexes suddenly appeared in the space where his swords were. Letting go of their night-colored hilts, Abel allowed the vortexes to silently engulf his blades, both the vortexes and blades vanishing as quickly as the former had arrived. All of this happened in less then two seconds. Sighing to himself, Abel took in a calming breath before he took off

at breakneck speed, rushing barefoot far faster than any normal human could match, through the first circle of obliterated land before he quickly reached the area of woodland that had not been decimated by his one-sided conflict with SCP-735, where there were many more trees and foliage still standing tall.

"Must keep moving… must keep moving…!"

Abel grunted with effort, forcing his exhausted body to keep racing through the trees, almost seeming as though he were dancing due to how well he navigated through the underbrush, ducking, leaping and maneuvering through the forest depths.

Where exactly he was going, he wasn't totally sure. However, if it meant one extra day of freedom from all the horrors he'd endured for so long and from the pursuers who would no doubt soon realize that he was missing, he'd head to the ends of the Earth.

"Fucking bitch…" Billy Hargrove swore as he left yet another "girlfriend's" house, rather disappointed by today's one-night stand. Only a few days after he and "King Stevie" had their little rumble, Billy quickly rose to popularity at the high school. Of course, one of his favorite perks of being popular: hot chicks who were willing to practically throw themselves at you.

This time, though, the girl that he'd been wanting to swoon into bed hadn't been quite as… receptive, as Billy had hoped. Fortunately for him, this little lady wasn't too high on the social totem pole, so he wouldn't need to worry about her being a liability either way.

"Welp, guess you can't win 'em all…" He muttered, ignoring Vicki's heartbroken sobs and cries from within the house he'd just exited. Sauntering across the street, he stopped in front of his car to light a cigarette and put it in his mouth. So caught up in his smoking, he didn't see the metal cube flying through the air and striking him square in the back and landing on the asphalt.

THUD!

"AAGH! THE FUCK!?" Billy cursed as he stumbled forwards, feeling the metal object hit him directly from behind. Catching himself right

before he would've fell forwards by grabbing the hood of his vehicle, he took a few seconds to catch his breath before he heard a familiar voice.

"Hey! Can you watch where you're smoking, [REDACTED]!?"

Whirling around, Billy glared in the direction of the voice with fists clenched.

"Dad, I don't give a-!" He cut himself off, seeing no one there. Leaning back slightly in confusion, Billy looked around. He could've sworn that he heard the smug voice of his arrogant step-father…

"Down here, asshole!"

Reflexively looking down, Billy was surprised to see a small grey metal box sitting on the asphalt in front of him. Leaning down, he kicked the box slightly, trying to see just what it was.

"Hey, uh… what the hell-?" He was about to ask himself but was cut off by that same irritating voice, coming from a small rectangular opening in the cube.

"Yeah, here's some advice, can you NOT touch me with those terrible shoes!? God, you'd think you would've listened to your mom more! Oh no, wait, you're too much of a bitch to admit it?" SCP-735 jabbed, clearly aware of what it was doing. Billy's features coiled in anger, and he looked around.

"Oh, yeah, REALLY fucking funny, Max! Yeah, ha ha, joke's on me! Now get the hell outta whatever hole you're hiding in, because I've had e-fucking-nough for one night!" He shouted, coming to the conclusion that Max or – God forbid – her new friends just pulled a prank on him using a recording device in a box. Instead of childish giggles, however, the Insult Box spoke up again.

"Hey, in case you're too much of a retard to notice, we're the only ones out here, dumbass!" It taunted, garnering Billy's attention again, "Why are you even trying to call your little sister out here, anyways!? OH! I get it! It's because you're her new loyal lap dog, isn't it, ever since she showed you how much of a pussy you are back at Byers'

house?"

All at once, Billy's face hardened darkly. His fists clenched and neck muscles bulged, veins clearly visible on his knuckles and forehead, and while his exterior face appeared calm, it was obvious by the sheer look in his furious eyes that there was an unholy rage within him,and it was clear that his rage was blinding him to the point where he no longer cared if this box were housing a recording or not. Quietly walking over to the Insult Box, he leaned carefully over it and glared directly into the hole in its front side. Taking in a deep breath, his voice was quiet, but it was obvious that it was holding back a fury just waiting to be released. And Seven-Three-Five was reveling in every bit of it as Billy's quiet yet furious voice left his lips.

"… What did you just say to me, bitch…?"

. . .

4. Odd Occurences

Odd Occurences

Hello again, dear readers, with another chapter! Warning: Cringy romance scenes abound! Seriously, you will find that I do not do well when it comes to the art of romance and love! XD

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The Doctor hummed merrily on the bus seat, one of the many hymns and songs he'd learned over the even more many years of his career as a surgeon. His ghostly eyes were peacefully shut, ignoring both the rattle-like sounds of the bus as it drove on and the stares of at least a dozen other people on the bus with them. Cain wished he could also act like the other passengers weren't staring at them like circus attractions. Which, truth be told, they just might need to become if they were to survive.

The three Skips had been riding at the back of the bus that Kali had advised them to for at least an hour now, and Cain had the misfortune of being sandwiched between the Shy Guy and Plague Doctor, neither of whom seemed to notice – or care about – the other passengers on their own way to Hawkins who either stared at them wide-eyed or sat in tense positions, ready to bolt to the front at any time. Even the driver kept sneaking glances at them through his rear view mirror. One child sitting with a woman who appeared to be his mother near the front of the bus occasionally looked back and waved to them with a smile on his pudgy face, and Cain nervously waved back every time with a sheepish grin, stopping after the mother noticed and sent a fierce glare his way.

Not that his supposed companions noticed.

Cain snuck a glance to the Shy Guy, who was seated to his immediate right. He was starting to get more disturbed by SCP-096 than the Plague Doctor. At least 0-4-9 could hold a decent conversation with

him at any given moment. Not once during their entire journey together thus far has Cain heard the Shy Guy's voice, or make any real sound. When he first heard about SCP-096 and its anomalies, Cain thought it was only called "The Shy Guy" because of the properties regarding his face… he didn't think he was literally shy around strangers! If there was a silver lining, though, the other passengers were safe thanks to the brown paper bag still on his certainly bald head and covering his face.

Unbeknownst to Cain, the Doctor had actually noticed all the silent attention that he and the others had gathered. In fact, he'd done a silent scan of the room five minutes after the bus departed to ensure that none of them could pose a threat to them. More specifically, that there were no Foundation agents in disguise who might try to re-contain them in such an enclosed area. The Plague Doctor was no fool, he knew that there was a very high chance that the Foundation was already out and looking for them. And he'd rather stay free to do his work than rot away in a cell like he'd been the last couple decades.

"Um…" Cain leaned over and discreetly whispered into his cloaked ear, "How much longer do you think we have until we reach Hawkins…?" He asked quietly. SCP-049 opened one eye in his white-masked face to glance at him, his humming ceased, contemplating the answer in his mind. As intelligent and knowledgeable in the field of biology as he was, geography was not one of the Plague Doctor's fortes, and it certainly didn't help that he'd never even been to America before, having spent much of his career in Europe. Still, he knew a thing or two regarding modern transportation thanks to having had to resort to less-than-ethical means of getting around Europe before the SCP Foundation found him.

"… about an hour or so." He finally replied in his usual raspy, dry tone. He expected Cain to sigh or groan in disappointment, but was somewhat surprised when the metal-armed man merely nodded and sat back again, his eyes facing directly ahead of where the bus was going, as if he was used to travelling long distances over long periods of time. He certainly seemed uncomfortable, yet at the same time not out of his element.

'Cain… a peculiar individual you are, indeed.'

Turning his head slightly so better get a look at Cain, The Doctor pressed, "I take it that you do not enjoy public transport?"

Cain's eyebrows rose, but shook his head, "No, I use buses and trains often. I actually travelled a lot before the Foundation found me… and I do mean a lot. It was… my calling, I guess you could say," he replied. SCP-049 only nodded slightly, then went back to humming the song he was humming earlier.

Cain shifted uneasily in his seat. The Plague Doctor was becoming more and more of an enigma every passing minute to him. Not only was he quite reserved and quiet despite their risky situation, but he also seemed more secretive than Cain himself was. Cain reminded himself that he was still his ally, at least for the time being, and all three of them shared the same goal of evading the Foundation for as long as they could. Well, he wasn't quite sure what the Shy Guy wanted, given that he hadn't spoken a word to him, or really even acknowledged Cain much throughout the short time they've known each other. In fact, the more he thought about it, SCP-096 was even more mysterious than the Doctor. At least 049 had most human mannerisms.

Deciding that it may as well be time to take a shot, Cain nervously reached a hand over and slowly brought it up, tapping 096 on the shoulder, "Erm… Zero-Nine-Six? What… might your take on this be?" He asked quietly and nervously. He was even more unnerved when the Shy Guy didn't respond or even acknowledge him in any way, simply sitting there with the paper bag on his head and not moving. He was about to try again when he felt the Plague Doctor nudge him.

"He's sleeping." The Doctor stated simply to him as Cain turned to face him, a warning glance in his cold stare. Cain immediately understood and resigned himself to simply sitting back and staring ahead again, waiting for the bus ride to be over.

None of them had anyway to detect the multi-legged, bright green arthropod-like creature darting about noiselessly on the roof of the bus, using its honed stealth skills to stay out of sight of any other drivers on the road, chittering about quietly yet anxiously, waiting patiently and in anticipation at the same time for the vehicle to stop to get an oppurtunity to stalk its targets.

If there was one thing Eleven had learned through living with Hopper for a year, it was patience. Sometimes his duty as chief of police - well, "often" was the better word for it – kept him from coming home until later than he usually promised. Through this, after many arguments involving how unexpected life can be, she was taught how to wait for her inevitable goals. This was what led to right now.

And "right now" currently consisted of her sitting patiently on her bed, eyes closed, the door to her room wide open. The clock on the wall read 3:12 PM. While Eleven could do many, many things with her powers, she sadly could not control time. So, she was stuck sitting patiently until the telltale signal of a special knock on the door would reach her ears, which Mike had promised would be in exactly 3 minutes. She had managed to rather quickly recover from her bout with the Mind Flayer after a few days' rest, though Hopper had insisted that she refrain from using her powers for at least a week. Which, sadly, meant no trying to telepathically track Mike or any of her friends' location.

She wasn't even aware that three minutes had passed until she heard it. Faint, but definite knocking on the cabin's secure door. In less than an instant, Eleven practically flew off her bed and made a mad dash for the door, unlocking it with her psychic power in the few seconds before she reached it. Throwing it open, she was overjoyed to find the grinning face of the one person she'd been longing to see ever since she stopped the Mind Flayer.

"MIKE!" She shouted, throwing her arms around him in a surprisingly tight hug. Caught off-guard slightly, Mike eagerly hugged back, glad to see that several days of rest had managed to allow her to recover.

"I made it! Three-fifteen, like I promised!" He stated joyfully after they separated, pointing to his watch for emphasis. Peering into it, Eleven easily recognized the 3:15 on the tiny clock. Suddenly, she noticed Mike's rather labored breathing, like he'd just ran a marathon. While Eleven wasn't exactly versed in the mechanisms of the human body, she knew enough that it wasn't particularly good.

"Um… Mike? Are you… okay?" She asked him cautiously. Normally, she wouldn't have been that worried, but after reuniting after nearly

a year and nearly dying immediately afterwards to fight the Upside Down monsters, things were obviously going to be a bit tense for a while. Nodding to reassure her, Mike panted hard, having just biked as fast as he could to visit Eleven, to the point that he nearly crashed several times since he was only thinking about Eleven and not the road. Luckily, it seemed fate had finally given everyone a break.

"Yeah… I'm fine…! I'm just glad you're alright!" He exclaimed, happy to see that she was almost totally unmarked after resting. Now that he'd taken some time to step back and look at her, he realized that nearly all of the punk-style clothing she'd been wearing had been replaced by a clean, tweed purple jacket over an orange shirt, with dark brown jeans and black shoes. Her previously slicked hair was now in rather small yet noticeable curls. Clearly, Hopper had not been a fan of El's mysterious change in fashion. Speaking of which…

"Uh… hey, El? What happened to your hair? And… everything else?" He asked, gesturing to her hair. While he knew that Eleven wasn't really into fashion as much as almost every other girl, he still would rather not want to potentially offend her. Luckily enough, she seemed more curious, noticing that he was talking about her latest change in clothing and hairstyle. "Oh, yes… Hopper did not like Sister's fashion advice." She explained, a smirk on her face, having remembered Hopper's fevered reaction to her suddenly having "delinquent punk" clothes and hairstyle, and his desperate attempts at getting the gel out of her previously clean hair. She also remembered telling him about her "Sister" and his stunned reaction. However, he ended up brushing it off, muttering "that figures…" as he went off to bed. El got the feeling, however, that the subject was nowhere near put out of his mind, though. Mike, however, quickly realized something off about El's choice of words… which was saying something.

"Wait, what 'sister'…? Were there… you know… other kids…?" Mike asked incredulously. Had Eleven gotten mixed up with a cult? It was obvious to him, as well as everyone else who knew her, that El had apparently left Hopper's cabin for some time and only came back just in time to face the Mind Flayer, but now that Mike thought about it, neither he nor his friends ever really got an explanation for where exactly Eleven went. Or what she did. He didn't think about it because Eleven's safety was obviously a higher priority than wherever

she'd been, but now that everything was (for the most part) calmed down, they could finally start asking some of the questions that he'd had in mind.

"I'll explain. Come inside!" Eleven happily said, walking back inside, Mike eagerly following behind and shutting the cabin door behind him. Looking around, he noticed how well-cleaned and organized the interior of the cabin was, which was surprising not only because of how soon it was after the Mind Flayer's defeat, but also because El and Hopper's rather… tumultuous and clashing natures were. He imagined that it couldn't have been too easy for the two to live under one roof. Taking a seat on the couch together, El couldn't help but lean her head on Mike's shoulder. She just couldn't find words to explain it – not yet, anyway – but being with Mike just made her so… happy. It was the same yet different from Hopper, that much she could tell.

"So…" Mike began awkwardly, "How was Hopper? What was it like… y'know, living with him?" He asked. El knit her eyebrows together, pondering the question. Yes, she still quite vividly remembered their fights, especially the last one they had before she ran off to find Kali. Even still, however, she still recalled how patient and kind he was, instructing her very specifically and giving her warnings for her safety, even when they danced together. Thanks to her cruel upbringing, El had come to only take note of all the bad things that happened, and yet…

"… Fun. He didn't keep me in a room like Papa. He was kind. He… understood." She finally elaborated, trying to use the best words she could. Fortunately, Mike understood, glad that Hopper had taken good care of El during their year apart. He already knew for a fact that El could fend for herself, but it was reassuring that she hadn't been alone all that time.

"Good… how is he doing, by the way? We, uh, haven't really got to talk to him again." Mike asked nervously. It was only now that he remembered that El didn't exactly have the best conversation skills. Trying not to be awkward, he did the first thing that came to his mind and put his arm around her shoulder. El seemed a bit confused at first, but relaxed and smiled at him, recognizing the warm gesture.

"He's busy. Job means he stays away longer sometimes but not all the time." She explained simply, in a somewhat bitter tone yet still understanding. Mike could get why, he knew she always strongly preferred exact details. Hell, she had recounted perfectly that it had been 352 days between their struggle against the Demogorgon and when they finally reunited. Mike looked to the clock, seeing that he had indeed made it right as he promised.

"I wonder how Max and Lucas are doing. They're at the Arcade, by the way… man, we really gotta take you there someday." Mike mentioned with a smile, but frowned upon seeing Eleven suddenly frown as he spoke. "El? What's wrong?" He asked worriedly, fearing he had said something to upset her.

"… Don't say 'Max'…" She finally uttered, averting her gaze, "I don't like her."

Mik was puzzled, his face scrunching up in wonder. What had Max ever done to El? She had obviously supported Eleven and all of them against an army of monsters, so why was Eleven taking a dislike to their new friend?

"Why not? She's our friend, remember?" Mike reminded her, trying to figure out what was wrong. Truth be told, El herself didn't quite understand this strange hate bubbling inside her. It wasn't the same hate she felt for Papa, nor was it quite the same as it was for the Mind Flayer. It was a strange, unique bitterness that coiled and crushed her chest, and it made her think of Mike as well. She remembered so clearly seeing them together in the school gym, and feeling that strange anger for the first time. Now that she'd learned her name, just thinking of the letters "M", "A" and "X" in a consecutive order brought that same bitter feeling back in spades, and it only went away whenever she remembered her relationship with Mike. But it never totally left her mind for long.

"She's a thief." Eleven finally answered bluntly, not looking at Mike. Now Mike was really confused. He'd considered Max annoying at first, but those feelings were long gone. Even more puzzling, he was pretty damn sure Max had never stole from them or anyone, except maybe Billy. Not to mention that Eleven had only known Max for literally less than a week, so it's not like they even had time to

properly get to know each other. Then again, Eleven didn't really conform to doing things the "proper" way.

"What do you mean? What did she steal?" Mike inquired, wanting to help in any way. He'd already accepted Max as a friend, but if she started messing with Eleven…

"Well… n-not yet… I think…" El answered vaguely, looking up to the ceiling in thought. Mike found himself gradually getting more and more confused. How on Earth could El know that Max was about to steal something but then not be sure? Last time he checked, El could move things with her mind, not see the future… yet.

"You 'think', El? Okay, if she hasn't stolen anything yet, what is she going to try to steal?" Mike asked clearly, wanting some solid answers. He watched El fidget nervously, and… was that a blush on her cheeks?

"U-Um… y-you…" El finally replied, slowly moving her gaze to look Mike in the eye, "I-I think she's going to steal you…"

Mike's eyebrows flew under his hair followed closely by his eyeballs popping from their sockets. If it weren't connected to his face, his jaw would've undoubtedly fallen to the floor. How and why in the world would Max bother with him when she and Lucas had pretty much established themselves as a couple!? Not to mention that she'd never even shown any romantic interest in him at all during the times they saw each other both in and out of school. And again, El hadn't even known her that long yet, so why would she even come to that conclusion-?

Wait…

"El… are you… jealous of Max?" Mike asked carefully, knowing he was stepping into foreign territory. El quirked a brow at him. "J-Jealous…?" She asked, pronouncing the word carefully and indicating she didn't know what it meant. Gulping nervously, Mike tried to think about the best way to go about this.

"W-Well, El, you know you feel about me… right? Love?" He began carefully. El nodded. While she didn't completely understand it –

though she was starting to think it was something that couldn't be totally comprehended – she knew it as that comfortable, uplifting and fluttering feeling in her heart, that soothing yet exciting sensation that made her feel like she could just soar above the clouds and not have a care in the world.

"Well, sometimes, when people fall in love with another person, and they think that someone else is going to try to steal that person's love and attention… it's called 'Jealousy'… it feels really, like, bitter… right? Like there's something squirming and writhing inside your chest, but you're not really,y'know, angry? It's close to angry, but… not really." He tried to explain, inwardly cringing at his inability to properly phrase it. Luckily, Eleven seemed to get the gist, and nodded. Taking a deep breath, Mike continued.

"El… I think you're jealous of Max… but she's already in love with Lucas; She's taken." He stated bluntly and somewhat nervously. Eleven widened her eyes with a small gasp, realizing her error. All this time, she'd been internally fearing that Max would try to take Mike's love away from her and make him leave her… but if she was already in love with Lucas, then…!

"Oh no… I was afraid of nothing!" She cried with a start,standing straight up. Mike seemed to notice her inner plight, getting up as well and taking her hands in his to calm her down. "Wait, wait! It's okay, Max is over it! She understands!"

"No!" El suddenly yelled, "I-I've been bad to her! I've been like… a bully!" she cried, breathing fast and recalling how terrible Troy had been to Mike, Dustin and Lucas. The fact that she'd been treating Max nearly as coldly did not feel good at all.

"Okay, how about this: After school tomorrow, I can bring Max over so you can talk!" Mike quickly said, trying to think of ways to resolve the admittedly still-tense air between Max and El so that everyone could move on. He already knew Max harbored no ill will and even held respect for El due to how much he and the boys had talked about her, but he had the feeling that El wouldn't be able to relax until she finally apologised to Max face-to-face. Upon hearing this, El seemed to calm down somewhat.

"T-Talk to her? Are you sure? Doesn't she hate me?" she asked quietly. Mike shook his head, "No, she doesn't hate you, El. Just a bit… upset, but she's over it! She's strong, like you!"

Eleven seriously doubted that Max, or any human being for that matter, came close to matching her in power… although she had the feeling that Mike wasn't talking about physical strength or superhuman powers, as confusing as it was for her.

"Are you sure?" El asked nervously, fearing all the different ways that her talking to Max about her feelings could go terribly wrong. However, Mike evidently had enough faith in both of them. "Absolutely. Trust me, she's not really the type to really bear grudges against a friend." Mike assured her. At this, El calmed down, sitting back down on the couch with Mike.

"… How do you do that?" El asked curiously. Mike quirked a brow. "How do I do… what?" He asked. "You always make me feel… not stressed…. Calm… Happy." She clarified.

"Oh." Mike realized, taking a few seconds to think. "I guess… that's just what people who are in love do to each other." he answered simply. El nodded, accepting it as close enough to her question. She doubted she'd be able to understand, anyway.

"So…", She began, getting Mike's attention, "Are sisters supposed to make you angry?"

Yawning quietly, Emily awoke peacefully, rubbing the sleep from her eyes and blinking them open slowly, realizing that she was still snuggling with Mr. Mowie, Poofa and Flozzle on the floor of the lab office they found. Lifting her arms up, she reached over and tried to poke Mr. Mowie's shoulder, but only managed to reach as far as his elbow. Awaking with a grunt, Mr. Mowie slowly rose, stood up on his stocky legs and gently moved his tail from Emily's petite frame. At the same time, Poofa, who Emily had been using as a pillow, also awoke, a bird-like chirp coming from the center of her body as she gathered air in her sacs and floated into the air, letting out small streams of gases from said sacs to push her body around in the air like a blimp. As for Emily herself, she quietly walked over and

inspected the still-sleeping Benjamin, prodding his shoulder tenderly.

"Um… Mr. Scientist-Worker-Person? Are you okay?" She asked nervously, not quite knowing what to do. Still a bit tired, she nervously looked around her dark surroundings, the dim lights making the shadows dance and simmer along the walls. Followed by Mr. Mowie and Poofa, she poked her head back out into the corridor.

"Hello? Is someone there?" Emily asked aloud, her nervous voice almost sounding like a sound bomb in the total silence and dark atmosphere of the abandoned lab. Shuddering at the sudden sound of her own voice, Emily slowly began exploring the ruined facility, flanked on either side by Mr. Mowie and Poofa protectively. Eventually, Emily and her abnormal creatures found themselves peering down a stairwell. Due to the lights being out, it may as well have been an abyss.

"Uh… um… scientists…? Teachers…? Anybody?" She called down into the darkness. Nothing answered back, which was terrifying by itself. Sensing that Emily was scared, Mr. Mowie planted a large foot protectively in front of her, ready to defend her at any moment as she stepped carefully into the darkness. Surprisingly, nothing ever jumped out at them as they descended, and they reached the lower floor without incident. Looking around, it was even darker than the level they'd come from since more of the lights were out, and the ones that were on were incredibly dim. Since Emily was already on edge, she was understandably for freaked out than usual when her foot nudged something organic.

"GAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!" She screamed loudly, tears stinging her eyes, which were shut due to her incredible terror at the moment. At the exact same time, Mr. Mowie, Flozzle and Poofa suddenly began to sieze, twitching and spasming where they were. After about a minute, Emily slowly realized that she wasn't being attacked and stopped screaming, blinking her eyes repeatedly in confusion. The second her scream stopped, her posse of monsters suddenly returned to normal with her. All three of Mr. Mowie, Poofa and Flozzle stopped spasming and immediately returned to what they were doing before, acting as though nothing had even happened. Emily nervously looked down to see what her foot touched. To her surprise, it seemed to be a dead animal of some sort lying motionlessly on the linoleum floor, its

limbs splayed out and not moving in the least.

The only reason that Emily was merely guessing it was an animal was because she couldn't identify it at all. She'd never seen anything like this in any of the books and videos that Habernathy, Logan and Izawa had ever shown her, and they'd showed her a LOT.

It had four legs like Mr. Mowie, but the similarities ended there. It had literally no hair on its entire body, and its body itself seemed slim yet muscular, similar to a canine. Along its bare back was a line of ridges from its spine, reaching all the way down to its short, thin tail. Its most distinctive feature, however, was its head, which seemed to have five large, powerful jaws instead of the just two, aligning so that it would've resembled a flower blooming when opening and closing its mouth. Right now, though, it appeared completely and utterly dead. Strangely, however, there were no markings or visible injuries anywhere on its body. It was as if it just literally dropped dead where it had been standing on the floor.

"Um… huh?" Emily questioned, gazing down at the strange creature. Suddenly, Mr. Mowie barked, getting Emily's attention and getting her to look down the corridor where he was facing. There, lying in a similar position near a corner, was another of the strange creatures, its flower-like mouth agape. Now that Emily noticed, there also appeared to be a strange mucus on their bodies. Walking over, she bent down and curiosly tapped the creature, with Poofa's tentacles raised up and Mr. Mowie baring his teeth, both prepared to defend Emily should the creature attack.

But it didn't. It layed quietly on the floor and Emily tapped its shoulder, staring at the strange mucus on her finger. Blanching, she quickly wiped it on the wall nearby.

"Eww! Gross! Blagh!" She whined, getting up and away from the thing. Staring down at it, her eyes quickly gained a curious glint, putting a finger to her chin. Turning around, she spoke to Poofa, "Hmmm… Hey, Poofa, can you wipe that icky slime off its chest for me?"

Immediately, Poofa lifted the thing's body using five tentacles, holding it up using four and using the fifth to wipe away the mucus

on the creature's chest, apparently not caring about to slime collected on her tentacle. Thanking her, Emily reached out and placed her palm on its now-dry ribs and chest. Out of nowhere, her hand sunk into its body as if it were gum, though Emily didn't react at all, apparently aware of what she was doing. A second later, she retracted her arm and held a small, deflated and dead heart of the monster in her small fingers, leaving a cavity in the area she'd reached in. Turning around and walking back to the first dead monster she'd found, she bent down and pushed the heart in her hand against the slimy skin on its chest.

"Okay… here we go!" Emily braced herself, pushing her hand fully into the thing's chest. Retracting it immediately, she wiped the excess slime on the wall, but immediately stopped when she heard a whining noise. Looking over her shoulder, she saw the flower-headed thing slowly stir, twitching at first before going still.

A second later, it suddenly sprang up onto its thin legs, looking around wildly before its gaze fell on Emily. Immediately, the much-larger Mr. Mowie stepped up, baring his teeth at it in case it attacked. But it didn't. It just watched her curiously, apparently not concerned at coming back to life. Emily cautiously approached it, flanked protectively on both ends by Mr. Mowie and Poofa. Now that the thing was standing straight on all four legs, she could tell that it was about the size of a large dog, standing roughly 3 feet tall at its shoulders. It kept its many jaws closed, resembling a flower before it bloomed as Emily slowly bent down in front of it.

"Who… Who are you?" She asked tentatively. The thing didn't answer, only stared at her with what appeared to be curiosity. Confused, Emily closed her eyes and reached out, slowly bringing her hand to the top of the creature's head.

…

…

…

"… Huh? Who's 'Father'?" Emily suddenly asked aloud, opening her eyes and moving her hand from its head. In response, the creature

only drooped its head down. Emily scratched her chin in wonder.

"Hmm… Oh! I'm gonna call you Flowey!" She exclaimed with a proud smile.

However, at the exact moment that its new name left Emily's lips, the flower-headed creature suddenly flinched, wincing and averting its gaze as if someone just wounded it. Noticing this, Emily immediately knew that it didn't like that.

"Oh… sorry! Um… how about… Astera?" She asked tentatively. This time, the strange creature tilted its head before making a strange squirting noise, lifting its front legs and slamming them down quickly in excitement. "Yay! Astera, it is!" Emily proclaimed. Mr. Mowie and Poofa, who'd previously been regarding the flower-headed creature with hostility, suddenly and inexplicably began giving it acts of kindess. Mr. Mowie rushed over and nuzzled the thing warmly whereas Poofa spun in the air excitedly, reaching a tentacle down and shaking the creature's paw. The flower-headed beast reacted with absolute confusion, looking around wildly with clearly no idea on what was happening.

"It's okay, Astera!" Emily reassured, throwing her hands in the air happily, "You're our new friend! Welcome to our friend circle, new friend!"

The newly-named "Astera" tilted its head but seemed excited, lifting the front end of their body and down again in excitement and matching Emily's feelings alongside Mr. Mowie, Poofa and Flozzle. In its apparent joy, it made a strange chittering sound, high-pitched and somewhat garbled. Suddenly, Emily froze, seemingly realizing something. At the exact same time, her mutated compatriots and Astera suddenly froze as well, although they didn't seem like they actually had an idea as well, more or less just simply mimicking Emily.

"Uh-oh… what about that Scientist-Worker-Person?"

"This is bullshit."

"Dustin, come on."

"I just don't see why we had to come back here, of all places!"

Will sighed softly, putting down a green colored pencil and replacing it with a sky blue one. He was currently sitting on a large log about a dozen feet away from the edge of the watery quarry. The exact same quarry where Dustin and Mike had nearly lost their lives to Troy and James as a result of revenge. And that was a fact that Dustin, standing several feet away and watching the cliffside warily, did not like. The cap-wearing boy kicked away a small rock in frustration as Will continued to draw the shimmering water surface, their bikes lying peacefully on the ground a few feet away from Dustin.

"Look, I didn't want you to be here either, but you know how my mom is. It'll probably be another five years before she can trust me to be safe by myself." Will explained part-jokingly, having already repeated it several times. Dustin knew he had a point, especially considering how much Joyce must've suffered looking out for the well-being of her second son, but it didn't make him any less frustrated at being near one of his least favorite places on the planet. "Can't you guys just get a guard dog or something? They can swim like pros, right?" Dustin suggested, watching the woods, or anything, really, to keep from looking at the deep lake below.

He knew he shouldn't have been uncomfortable, but the memory was still vivid in his mind because of the unforgettable way El had saved them. That, and Dustin and water had never really gotten along to begin with, hence the reason he and Lucas had struggled so hard just to properly set up the kiddie pool Eleven needed to find Will and Barbara in the previous year.

Will finished drawing the branches of a tree standing low over the cliff on the other side, holding his notebook firmly on his lap, "Didn't you say that Eleven made Mike levitate here? And that she broke Troy's arm?" He asked, though it was more to try to cheer Dustin up by bringing up good memories than actually find out how it was like. Luckily, it seemed to do the trick, as a small smile appeared on Dustin's previously agitated face.

"Oh, dude, you so should've seen that! It was awesome!", Dustin

exclaimed, pumping his fist in the air for emphasis, "He jumped like a badass—well, I mean, you could still tell he was shitting his pants, but he still jumped like a badass! And then out of nowhere, El just shows up from the shadows and makes him float up and was all—" Dustin lowered his voice to a comically low and dark, menacing tone, "—'Get outta here or I'll piss your pants again!'" He explained comically, overdramatically recounting the incident and seemingly forgetting his previous discomfort at being there. Will had already heard the tale several times from Mike, but Dustin's way of telling stories was just plain hilarious.

"Did she seriously break his arm just by turning her head?" He asked, trying to keep the conversation going while not looking away from his art. Dustin turned and grinned widely, "You bet she did, she just looked at him like 'Bitch!', and his arm just snapped like a twig! He just screamed like a little bitch and ran! Hah, he went right to his mommy and didn't show his face at school for a week!" He confirmed, clearly enjoying the memory.

Will almost wished he was there to see it, having heard from Lucas and Dustin about how Troy and several other students had been quite a bunch of assholes about his apparent "death" and disregarding his well-being and feelings entirely. Key word, of course, being that he "almost" wished he'd seen it. As amazing as El breaking Troy's arm may have been – and boy, did Dustin love to brag about how epic it was – Will Byers had never been a fan of violence in any scenario, and he wasn't about to start now.

Dustin then suddenly looked up, his face going from pleasantly happy to confused. He turned his head about the surroundings woods, as if trying to find something. "Uh, Dustin? What's up?" Will asked, not noticing anything out of the ordinary. Dustin kept rubbernecking like a tourist, "Don't you hear that?" He asked, glancing at Will in his peripheral vision, now staring in a single general direction in the forest. Will was about to reply that he did not, in fact, hear anything, but then he heard it, too.

Rustle, rustle, crash, thud, rustle…

It sounded like… something moving through the trees? Was someone jogging at full speed through the woods right now? Will couldn't

imagine why, considering the rather understandably dangerous reputation that the forest surrounding Hawkins had gained after the Demogorgon's rampage. He desperately moved his mind away from those thoughts, having had enough of extradimensional monsters in the last two years.

"Is that… a person? I think I hear somebody… do you?" Dustin inquired, taking a careful step sideways towards Will, who put his drawing down to stand up next to Dustin. Now that Will focused, he could faintly hear what sounded like a man's ragged and paced breaths alongside the sound of something deftly moving through the underbrush, barreling through branches and bushes in their way. Will blinked twice, not quite sure what to think, "Why… why would somebody-?"

He was cut off by the sound of whoever it was suddenly letting out a bloodcurdling shout, the sounds of rage and ferocity clear it whoever this person was, instantly making the boys jump and sending chills down their spines. Having enough, Dustin reached down and snatched Will's papers and pencils, shoving them into the shorter boy's arms, "Okay, we gotta get the hell outta here, I do not feel like sticking around to find out—!"

At that exact moment, the most terrifying thing happened: A tall, somewhat dark-skinned man wearing only a tunic and covered in strange tattoos suddenly burst out of the trees, screaming bloody murder and wielding two pitch-dark machetes that didn't even glint in the sunlight. Not even given enough time to scream, Dustin and Will barely managed to jump to either side of their attacker to avoid getting cleaved in two by the man's razor-sharp blades swinging vertically down as he pounced on them, the two boys using reflexes honed from dealing with interdimensional monsters.

"GAH! SHIT, WHAT THE FUCK!?" Dustin screamed as he landed flat on his back, his backpack breaking his fall as he hastily sat up, spotting their assailant land perfectly on his bare feet on the spot where the two boys where previously standing. Growling hard like a starving beast on the hunt, the man stayed still for several seconds, leaning forwards with his back hunched over and his face obscured by his long, dark hair. The only thing Dustin could really take note of, however, were the two long pitch-black blades in his tattooed and

somewhat sweaty hands, which were gripping the hilts as if nothing else mattered in the world. Across from where Dustin had landed, Will was lying on his side on the other side of the man, staring with wide eyes at how close they had come to being shredded. Strangely - though neither Will nor Dustin noticed due to their understandable shock and fear at the situation - the man was also breathing in and out incredibly hard, like he'd just ran a full marathon and sprinted the entire way.

"… Y-You…" The man quietly uttered, so quietly in fact that neither boy would've heard it if they were any further away. The man, who's voice was shaky and full of emotion, suddenly turned his head towards Will, his ancient-seeming eyes full of rage and bloodlust, "… are next."

Will at first seemed confused, but then instantly felt panic sink in when the man raised one of his wickedly-sharp blades straight at him, his cold eyes almost seeming to calculate where exactly he'd stab and skewer him. The tunic-wearing stranger took a single terrifying step towards him, and Will tried to scoot backwards, only to recoil in horror at the realization that their bikes where left near where Dustin now was. The man glared at Will, hatred brimming in his ancient-seeming eyes as if Will just committed the single-most heinous sin anyone had ever done in all the years humanity has existed, gritting his yellow teeth angrily and hot air firing off through his flared, filthy nostrils.

All Will could do was scramble backwards on the ground, his terror-filled eyes locked firmly on the stranger's hate-filled ones and his dark, shaking swords. Suddenly, looking into this man's eyes, Will found himself reminded of his encounter with the Demogorgon; All alone, against a savage hunter who couldn't wait to tear him limb from limb and take his corpse as a trophy. Only this time… he wasn't alone.

"Hey! Dick-hole!"

Out of nowhere, a backpack flew form behind Will's soon-to-be-assailant and hit the man in the back, falling unceremoniously to the ground without so much as making the man flinch. Everything seemed to grind to a halt as the man slowly turned around, unfazed

by the hit in the slightest, and he and Will both fixated their stunned gazes onto a panting Dustin. He looked absolutely terrified, and ready to wet his pants just from the stranger turning his murderous gaze onto him. However, judging solely by the way his feet were planted into the ground and his fingers curled into fists, Will could see that Dustin had no intention of running.

"What!? Can't handle that you just got owned by a kid!? Huh!?" Dustin yelled at the man, trying to sound tough and scary but only managing to childishly scream his lungs out. In reply, the man narrowed his bloodthirsty eyes at Dustin, the demonic-looking tattoos strewn across his body almost seeming to jeer and laugh as his large muscles strained and rippled under his torn tunic.

Not saying anything, the man only took two quick stomps forwards, clearly intent on cleaving Dustin in two. As he was about to do so, however, he felt his foot nudged something.

"… Huh?" He growled, his voice scratchy and ragged, like he'd gone weeks without using his voice. Stopping in his tracks, he looked down to see the art that Will had been working on prior to his rather rude arrival. After a few moments, he turned his head sideways without moving his shoulders or chest to see the landscape had almost perfectly matched that of Will's drawing. Shakily bending over and picking up the drawing and lining it up with the quarry before him, Will and Dustin watched uneasily as the stranger glanced at the drawing, then the actual landscape, and then back to the drawing of the quarry again with incredulity. For a second, Will thought he might've been hallucinating until the man glanced at him again. This time, however, much of the bloodlust was gone.

"Did… did you make this…?" The sword-wielding maniac asked him, still holding the well-detailed drawing. Dustin still hadn't moved, trying to inconspiciously lean down to grab a rock off the ground to throw it at the stranger. Luckily, it seemed he didn't have to since the man no longer seemed interested in maiming them. Not right now, anyway.

Seeing that his assailant was temporarily no longer interested in killing him – yet – Will quickly found his voice to answer. "Uh, y-yeah… I-I came here to draw the quarry. I-It looks good… I-I think…"

He carefully worded, doing his best not to say anything that might set the man off again. Luckily, the sword-wielding man seemed not to be provoked again, continuing to stare back forth between the drawing and the lake and surrounding greenery that accompanied it. Meanwhile, Dustin was frozen stiff, although that was more so out of fear that any sudden movement might suddenly incur his wrath once more. He kept glancing between the man and Will, trying (and, for the most part, failing) to come up with a plan in case he tried to attack Will again.

As it turned out, he didn't have to. The man simply turned to Will, took a few gentle steps forwards, and gently handed the papers to a visibly shaking Will. "You enjoy nature's gifts, do you not?" He asked, shocking Will. Not really because of the question itself – although, why he would ask anything pertaining to nature after having just tried to kill him seconds prior was baffling in of itself – but it was especially surprising because of the man's tone; Quiet, calm and reserved, which seemed to be an almost exact opposite clash with his earlier enraged, energy-filled and outright bloodthirsty he was before.

Realizing that he wasn't quite off the hook yet, Will hurried to find his voice again, "Y-Yeah, I do… I like c-coming out here to draw a lot…". The man seemed to accept the answer, nodding in understanding. The edge in his ancient, dry and dark eyes weren't totally gone, but he no longer seemed interested in gutting Will or Dustin alive.

"Hmm… such youthful interest… a pity there are not more men in this world with such a passion and love for our Earth…" The man said quietly, a faraway look on his face, seeming as though he was no longer totally paying attention to the boys he'd just tried to stab to death. Dustin took the oppurtunity to send a warning glance to Will, one that Will was able to decipher quite easily. No words were exchanged, but it was obvious what Dustin was trying to silently say to Will.

He's crazy! Get the hell outta here!

Will found it hard to disagree. A tunic-wearing man wielding black swords comes swinging out of the forest at them for little to no reason, stops after seeing Will's above-average artwork, and then

starts preaching to them about being environmentalists…

Yeah, Will and Dustin could both agree that this man was the definition of crazy.

"Well… I suppose I am to be going now." The man abruptly stated out of nowhere. Will and Dustin both just stared in shock; First, this man came out of literally nowhere and tried to brutally kill and maim them, then decided to stop after seeing Will's art, and now he was just casually up and leaving as if he was just having a friendly visit and not attempting a homicide. In fact, now that Will thought about it… the swords that the man had been carrying before were nowhere in sight now, having vanished after the man gave Will his drawing back.

Without any other words, the mysterious man suddenly faced the direction just slightly to the left of where Will had landed and sprinted straight off, moving so fast that not only was he a blur to Will and Dustin, but a dust cloud kicked up where he took off from and temporarily blinded the shell-shocked boys, eliciting coughs from both of them. When the cloud dissipated, the man was nowhere in sight, only a trail of pounding footprints and the sound of someone lightly brushing past branches and bushes. Dustin stared at the spot where the man once was, and then to an equally shocked Will. Will didn't get up from his seat on the dirt, only choosing to crane his neck back in the direction the man ran off to. Not knowing what to do, Dustin said the first thing that came to his mind.

"Uhh… we don't need to tell your mom about this, right?"

It was evident that waking up in strange, new places was starting to become the norm for Ben. Opening his eyes wearily, the rogue D-Class suddenly found himself staring up at a white ceiling. A laboratory ceiling. Just like the Foundation.

"GAH! WHAT!?" He shouted, instantly jolting to a sitting position, eyes wide open and fully awake. He was so focused on himself that he nearly fell off the desk he was on.

'*Wait… a desk? Why am I on a desk? Better not have been Clef, I*

swear…', He begrudgingly thought, until he suddenly realized something.

He wasn't in a containment cell.

Nor was he in a standard D-Class "room" (though it was pretty obvious to everyone in the Foundation that those were basically prison cells, too), and he sure as hell wasn't being interrogated. He wasn't in restraints, and he hadn't even been sitting in the chair literally right next to the desk he was on. Now that he thought about it, the room he was currently in looked more like an office more than anything else. Even then, it looked strangely… deserted. Papers were tossed around and left askew on the floor, and the lights on the ceiling were strangely dimmed out. Taking a few tentative steps off the desk and stepping onto the linoleum floor, Ben carefully stepped out of the room and into the hallway. To his surprise, the entire building seemed dilapidated and abandoned, though likely not more than a few days. Still, it was clear that this was once a fully functioning science facility of some kind. Suddenly, Ben felt like something was missing…

'Wait… wait, where's Emily…?'

All at once, Benjamin as far more alert, his terrible experience from escaping the breached Site kicking in and already filling his mind with worst-case scenarios. What if the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile found her and killed her on the spot? What if everything that happened in the forest was just some dream cooked up in a sick experiment by the researchers? Did the Foundation already realize that some of their anomalies were missing and had already recaptured Emily? Was this some post-apocalyptic wasteland that he was now doomed to wander?

Stepping carefully down the corridor, Ben's sharp eyes closely monitored everything, especially the spots on the walls and corners that were hidden by the shadows. Carefully walking so that his footsteps would've been hard to hear, he was surprised when, all of a sudden… he could hear a child laughing nearby?

Since it was an abandoned scientific facility with a child's nearby laughs echoing about, Benjamin was instantly unnerved. Then again,

who wouldn't be in this particular situation? Looking about for anything he could use, Ben was dismayed at only finding a small mop on the floor, having apparently fallen down after someone had opened the closet it had been placed it and causing it to fall over. Reaching down slowly and picking up the mop in his shaky hands, Ben felt the weight in his hands, brandishing the mop as though it were a spear. Cautiously walking around the corner, his eyes bulged as he saw what awaited him.

"… What the hell are you?" He couldn't help but ask aloud. Standing there, three feet in front of him, was what looked like a strange, hairless dog with no face, its head resembling a flower bud before it bloomed. It was simply standing there on its four, thin legs, staring emotionlessly up at him. Ben stared confusedly right back, not quite knowing how to respond.

"Uh… what the fu-?" Ben started to ask but was cut off by a child's high-pitched squealing.

"ASTERA!" Emily shouted, bursting from behind a corner behind the strange-headed creature. Right behind her were Mr. Mowie and Poofa, matching her pace. As soon as Emily saw the creature, she grinned widely and practically tackled it, wrapping her arms around the creature's body and getting some of the slime on Flozzle's orange sleeves. Both the girl and the creature fell to the floor, though to Ben's surprise, it seemed to be enjoying the attention that Emily was giving her. Getting back up, Emily giggled, patting the creature's head while Flozzle's sleeves vibrated harshly, shaking the excess mucus off.

"There you are, Astera! Don't wander off like that!" Emily chided, though her laughing tone made it clear that she was having more fun than anything. The flower bud-headed creature made a mix of a bark and a chittering sound, apparently having fun as well. All the while, Ben could only blink in astonishment, staring in utter confusion at the scene in front of him.

"What?" Was the only thing he could manage to sputter out. Emily seemed to finally notice that the former D-Class was there and perked up, seeming even more happy.

"Mr. Scientist-Worker-Person! You're awake! How are you feeling?" She asked happily, running up to him and grinning from ear-to-ear. Truth be told, Benjamin was a bit taken aback, not quite used to someone asking how he felt. Or someone talking to him at all to begin with, for that matter. He didn't even notice that she'd called him "Mr. Scientist-Worker-Person". Raising a brow, it took him a few seconds to respond.

"Er… I'm… I'm doing fine, I guess?" He looked around the ruined lab, another burning question is his mind. "Hey, um, just where are we…? This… this isn't the Foundation, is it?" He asked nervously. Emily tilted her head in confusion.

"Uh… hold on…" She said, putting a finger to her chin to think, "The sign said… 'H-Hawkins National… Laboratory'… Yeah! Hawkins National Laboratory! It said so on the sign outside!" She stated, beaming up at him, evidently proud of herself for managing to remember the name and saying it right. However, that didn't help Ben much at all.

'Hawkins? Where the hell is that? … Well, at least now I know this isn't a dream or another Foundation Site', Ben mentally confirmed. On one hand, he still had no clue where he was. Well, he knew that he was in a laboratory in a place called Hawkins, but he had no idea where Hawkins was. On the other hand, however, it was also obvious that he was still out of the clutches of the SCP Foundation and very much alive and healthy. Shaking his head, he decided to try to answer a few of the lesser questions he had in mind.

"Okay then… just who are you?" He asked Emily, raising a brow. He recalled how she managed to recognize his D-Class jumpsuit, and only someone connected to the Foundation in some way would ever be able to do that. Once again, Emily seemed confused at the question.

"Uh, my name's Emily, remember? You hit your head really hard in the forest when we were running from that big bad dragon!" She recalled, pointing to the top of her own pink-haired head for emphasis, "Oh! I almost forgot!" She suddenly gasped, her eyes going wide. Quickly turning around, she walked over and stood next to Mr. Mowie and Poofa, gesturing to them.

"This is Mr. Mowie," She said, pointing to the large, blue-and-pink colored furry beast on her right, who let out a yipping noise, "And this is Poofa!" Emily then gestured to the round, floating insectoid on her left, who raised her long tentacles and waving them at Ben. Finally, she pointed to her orange sweater.

"And this is Flozzle! Say 'hi', Flozzle!" Emily exclaimed, looking down at her sweater. To Ben's surprise, her sweater suddenly shifted, a long tendril extending from the "cloth" and forming an amorphous elbow-less arm and hand, waving it at Ben. All Ben could do was stare at the living sweater. He then noticed that she hadn't introduced the hairless flower bud-headed creature.

"And… him?" Ben asked, nervously pointing at the strange entity. Upon noticing, Emily gaped, realizing she'd failed to introduce him. "Oh! That's Astera, our new friend! Say 'hi', Astera!"

Astera opened his five jaws, showing the tiny, bristling teeth and his large circular throat, resembling a blooming flower. A strange cross of a chittering sound and a giggle emanated from his throat, surprising Ben with his intelligence and nervously waved back. However, this led to new questions.

Who was this girl? Clearly, she was one of the anomalous humanoids contained by the Foundation, but which one? She had bright pink hair… her eyes were discolored, and one of them was blind… Her name was Emily… she could control and talk with mutant, genetically-altered animals-!

"Uh…" Ben began nervously, having reached a conclusion on who this girl was, "You wouldn't happen to have… other names?" He inquired. Instantly, shock encompassed Emily's face, her eyes widening and her jaw dropping.

"Um… well… s-some of the other m-meaner scientist-people called me Oh-Forty and 0-4-0… D-Dr. Izawa also called me… Evolution's Child… whatever that means…" Emily replied shyly. Ben slowly nodded, having confirmed his suspicions. This was SCP-040, Evolution's Child, and her evolutionary miracle creatures that were genetically altered by her Site-renowned anomalous powers.

He'd already heard of her during his time as a D-Class, recounting how he overheard the many conversations held by the guards that would escort him to his "duties". It was almost astonishing what the seemingly emotionless soldiers talked about as they escorted D-Class personnel from their cells to their various death sentences and SCP containment cells. He'd already gained numerous knowledge on many SCPs by overhearing the rumors and tales spread about by the site security and researchers. Among them, of course, was a rumor about a girl who could magically change, alter and merge animals into mutants with special abilities that obeyed her every command. And somehow, Ben managed to meet both her and SCP-682 in the middle of the woods after escaping the Foundation and seemingly magically teleporting there. At this rate, there were more questions than answers arising from every little thing that happened, he realized with frustration.

"So… what about you?"

At first, Ben didn't register the question, too wrapped up in his own thoughts. Then he realized that SCP-040 was looking expectantly at him.

"Huh?" He asked rather stupidly. Emily seemed confused. "Um… I asked what your name was?" She pressed. Ben mentally facepalmed for not understanding earlier, still not quite used to someone else caring about him. Clearing his head, he decided he may as well give his name too.

"U-Um… it's Benjamin… Benjamin Oliver Walker. But, uh… you can just call me Benjamin or Ben, if you like." He nervously replied. Emily stared at him for a second, then smiled happily at him.

"Ooh! Nice to meet you, Mr. Benjamin!" She beamed, holding out her hand for him to shake. After a moment of hesitation, Ben reached out and shook her hand, retracting it after no more than three seconds. "So… are you one of the scientists at the Foundation lab?" Emily asked curiously. Ben's eyes widened.

"Uh… N-No… I was a D-Class who… got out." He replied vaguely, not really wanting to spill his guts to her. Or anyone, really. Fortunately, Emily seemed to accept that answer, merrily skipping

along past him, her mutant friends in tow behind her. "Okie-dokie! Let's go!" She exclaimed happily, her furry friends eagerly trailing behind her. Benjamin, however, was left confused.

"Wait, where are we going?" He asked, not wanting to dive headfirst into this venture. Obviously, he and Emily were going to have better chances of staying free by sticking together, but it wouldn't matter unless they knew where they were going. Emily casually looked over her shoulder to answer.

"Back to the Foundation, silly!"

Almost immediately, Ben felt all color drain from his face. He quickly broke into a run, rushing past Mr. Mowie and Astera to stop in front of Emily.

"Wait, wait, wait, why!? Why are you trying to go back!?" He practically shouted, partly in confusion and partly in outrage. Emily stared at him like he grew another head. "Uh… because that's where Mister Logan and Izawa are? Where else would we go?" She stated, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Behind her, Mr. Mowie and Poofa also stared at Ben weirdly, though Astera seemed a bit conflicted.

Ben couldn't believe what he was hearing. He'd gone through what pretty much constituted as actual living hell in order to escape that damn, godforsaken place, and just barely managed to escape with his sanity intact after so many trials and soul-wretching struggles… and this little girl wanted to go back to her holding cell!? Well, granted, she obviously got better treatment in her containment cell than literally any D-Class ever did, but now they both had a chance of freedom! And Ben would be damned if he let the SCP Foundation have their way again, especially if it involved him!

"W-Well… why don't we try to find a home outside the n-nice Foundation?" Ben suggested, plastering a smile on his face and using a disgustingly fake happy voice to try to appeal to Emily, though the way he said "nice" almost sounded like he was dying just from saying it. "And, um… where would that be?" Emily asked curiously, interested somewhat in the idea. Ben started to sweat nervously, thinking quickly to try to convince Emily not to return to the clutches

of the Foundation.

"Um, well, why don't we… look around! Yeah, we can try looking around for a place to stay! B-But we can't let anyone see your… uh, friends!" He suggested, trying to appeal to Emily's childish ignorance and views. Emily seemed to ponder the idea, but looked worriedly behind her at her companions, evidently worried about possibly having to separate from them. Ben wanted to pull the hair from his head, frustration clearly visible on his features.

"Ugh… Come on, there's gotta be—" Suddenly, he had an idea. Quickly, he pointed to Emily's living sweater, AKA Flozzle, "Your sweater—er, Flozzle can change shape, right?"

Emily, although seeming confused, nodded. "Uh, yeah! He's really good at hiding and being helpful with his shapey-powers!" She affirmed, the aforementioned symbiote briefly flashing a green color in agreement. Nodding himself, Ben continued.

"Okay, well, what if Flozzle just leaves trail for your friends? That way, they'd know how to find you!" He suggested. Emily was about to retort, but paused to think. After several seconds, she stared down at Flozzle. As if reading her thoughts, a small, incredibly thin thread-like tendril sprouted from the sweater's back, falling to the floor and continously growing from Flozzle's back like the thread released by a rolling ball of yarn. Mr. Mowie, Poofa and Astera all gazed down and stared at the continually-growing orange line. Then, after about a second, they all looked to Ben and nodded all at the same time.

"Okay! Sounds like a good idea, Mr. Ben!" Emily agreed, waving her arm happily. Ben wiped a bead of sweat from his head, happy that convincing her hadn't been too much of an issue. Now for the hard part.

"Good! So, uh… where's the exit to this place?" Ben had to ask, having no clue as to the layout of the lab. Emily beamed up at him, realizing that she had a chance to help.

"Oh! Oh! It's this way! Follow me, Mr. Benjamin!" She shouted, rushing past him and gesturing for him to follow, the thread-like tendril produced by Flozzle trailing behind her and showing where

she had been and where she was going to. Ben was about to gladly follow, until several burning glares were felt drilling into the back of his head. Turning nervously around, he nearly shouted in panic upon seeing the warning glares that Mr. Mowie and Poofa were sending him. It shouldn't have even have made sense considering how neither could completely replicate a human facial expression, yet Ben could still easily make out the warnings in their faces.

Don't let anything bad happen to her, or we'll find you and have you for supper.

Nervously, Ben nodded and hastily turned around and sprinted after Emily, following the orange trail left by Flozzle. Strangely enough, Astera didn't join his new compatriots in giving Ben a warning look, more or less just staring off into space, as if not yet as connected to Emily as the others were.

Luckily, Ben didn't even need to follow the trail for long, quickly catching up to Emily thanks to his much longer strides. Skipping merrily down the hallways and corridors, Emily quickly managed to remember the way to the ruined lab's entrance. Instinctively keeping an eye on the cold, barren walls and doorways in case anything jumped out at them, Benjamind joined Emily as they stopped in front of the double-doors leading outside. Ben nearly had to cover his eyes due to the blinding sunlight, gritting his teeth as the rays struck his eyes. However, he didn't dare hesitate or get cold feet now; He'd been waiting longer than he thought he could remember for a chance to finally live a normal life again. And if that meant hanging around with this abnormal girl for a while, he had no problem waiting just a tiny bit more.

'Well… here goes nothing.'

With that, Ben took a few steps ahead of Emily, gripped the doors leading to a small concrete path, and shoved them open with more force than intended, the sweet air from outside invading his senses all over again. Last night, he hadn't really had a chance to celebrate due to getting chased by the genocidal giant monster known as SCP-682, but now that he had every chance to try and re-join society at long last… he would be damned if he let himself take it for granted.

"Well… let's go", He stated simply, beckoning for Emily to join him, and the two began briskly walking along the path leading past the gates, feeling the strange yet welcoming sensation of the warm sun raining warmth onto their bodies.

"… Are you fucking kidding me? WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'THEY *VANISHED*'!?"

Furious shouts could be heard in the blank hallways of Site-17, the guards glancing nervously in the direction of the head researcher's office. Dr. Gerald gulped nervously from his position in front of the older man's desk, keeping an eye on the ominously shadow-shaped cloud of butterflies looming over him, "I-I mean they seem to have spontaneously disappeared from containment… there have been no visible signs of physical breaches in their containment cells, and neither SCP-105 nor SCO-073 have displayed anomalies pertaining to physical displacement or teleportation. Simply put, there have been no signs of how they've breached containment or where they've gone, Kondraki."

Dr. Kondraki wasn't usually one for frustration, but this was easily an exception. Rubbing his temples, Kondraki gestured for the swarm to stand down before pressing on, "When was the last recorded time before they disappeared?"

"13:41 hours. There was no signs of another escaped Skip in the Site, and—"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. They're gone and we have no clue how or where they escaped to." Kondraki interrupted sourly, resisting his urges to keep yelling. Apparently, both Iris and Cain had somehow managed to completely disappear from their respective "containment chambers", although Kondraki, Gerald and the other staff of Site-17 seemed to agree that they were less like prison cells and more or less like heavily-guarded dormitory rooms.

It wasn't so much that Kondraki saw the humanoid SCPs as beneath him, though. In fact, the Site director actually enjoyed talking to both Iris and Cain whenever he wasn't out in the field or tinkering with his SCP-crossed camera SCP-515, and saw them as equal human beings.

However, as the head of research and Site director of Site-17, it was still his duty and responsibility to ensure they were kept in containment both in and out of experimentation. Meaning, the O5s would blame HIM for their sudden missing status and likely stranded in some random alternate dimension or some dark corner on the planet. Meaning, Dr. Kondraki was most likely screwed.

Suddenly, a short *beep!* from his desk computer interrupted whatever he was going to say next. Grumbling to himself, Kondraki opened up his emails to see a new message from his fellow Foundation researcher, Dr. Gears. He was about to dismiss it to keep asking Gerald about the situation, but stopped when he saw the subject of the email.

Potentially missing anomalous objects?

Ignoring Dr. Gerald's puzzled face, Kondraki hastily opened the email to fully read its contents.

From: Dr. Gears, SCP Development and Review, Euclid-Class Specialist

To: Dr. Kondraki, Head of Research; Site-17

CC: Prof. Kain Pathos Crow, Dr. Light, Dr. Bright, Dr. Gears, Dr. Clef

There was a breach at the Site wherein multiple anomalies contained by the Foundation were temporary relocated to after the recent attacks by the Chaos Insurgency. We have reason to believe it to have been caused by SCP-079 with aid of undercover agents of the aforementioned Chaos Insurgency, most likely researchers who were sent in by the Insurgency to unleash the contained entities and items. The Mobile Task Force Epsilon-11 "Nine-Tailed Fox" have already succesfully contained the breach as well as the majority of breached anomalous objects. Repairs to Foundation property and security have already been calculated and currently under preparation. However, the most alarming result of this incident is the sudden unaccounted-for disappearance of multiple anomalous entities and items from the temporary Site they were previously stored in. There is little evidence that the Insurgency captured and contained them for themselves thus far, and none of the unaccounted for anomalous objects were reported, by surviving personnel or camera recordings, to have exited the Site during nor after the breach. The missing

anomalous objects thus far appear to be:

SCP-049

SCP-096

SCP-513

SCP-178

SCP-372

SCP-714

SCP-420-J

SCP-1499

SCP-682

The only potential clues as to these sudden individual breaches and disappearances were readings of enormous bursts of electromagnetic energy and radiation centered around the last recorded locations of each of the anomalous objects reported within the Site. While nothing has been confirmed yet, Central Monitoring has already issued the possibility of multiple space-time disturbances and is currently making progress into confirming this hypothesis. If you or any other researchers and/or security personnel note similar disappearances or the resurfacing of the above-mentioned objects and/or anomalous occurences, I don't need to tell you what to do, nor what the potential consequences will be.

- Gears

Kondraki already felt beads of sweat rolling down from under his flat top cap, gritting his teeth. Neither Cain nor Iris would hurt a fly, he was certain, having talked and worked with them countless times... but the Plague Doctor, Shy Guy and Peripheral Jumper? There was not telling what carnage they could cause unchecked. Not to mention the numerous item anomalies that could do any number of harm if found and handled by the wrong people, which would definitely happen now that they were out there in the public somewhere. And of course, the fact that the Hard-to-Destroy Reptile was out…

Kondraki felt a slight shiver down his back. The great monstrosity would not hesitate to attack and annihilate any large human population it came across, no matter how attention-grabbing it would be. In fact, it would probably enjoy it if it attracted the attention of military enforcements, since it would provide even more death and destruction … that, and it was undoubtedly still feeling vengeful after their last encounter.

"Um… Kondraki…?" Gerald asked, having been fidgeting nervously for the last several minutes. Dr. Kondraki stood up and looked him straight in the eye. "Are you absolutely sure that there was nothing left in their chambers?"

Dr. Gerald made a thinking face before responding, "Er… no, nothing except a strange increase in electromagnetic energy and radiation, not to mention—Hey, where are you going?"

Kondraki pushed gruffly passed him, having heard enough and now on his way to the containment chambers. Gerald stumbled after him, confused by the sudden shift. Several twisting turns around the Site-17 halls later, and the researchers found themselves in front of SCP-073's containment chamber. Snorting to himself, Kondraki quickly used his Level 4 Clearance card to open the door and stepped inside without hesitation. Peering inside, he instantly recognized Cain's two-room cell, with several bookshelves, a table with several books from said bookshelves lying face-open on it, a chair pushed up to the table, a private bathroom situated on the far wall of the second room, a sheep-skin carpet in both roons, and a bed on the far side of the second room.

The two rooms were situated side-by-side and separated by a wall with a doorway allowing passage between them in the center of the wall, and Kondraki knew already that Cain's bed was in the second room. Carefully stepping through the door as Gerald watched, Kondraki peered into the second room. And then he felt it. He didn't know exactly how, but he could just somehow feel the strange aura radiating off Cain's bed. He then remembered that the last time anyone had seen Cain, he had left from the canteen to rest in his room after a full lunch with two of the guards he'd gotten friendly with. If Cain had been on his bed when he'd vanished…

Gerald carefully stepped through Cain's room and cleared his throat, "Erm… Konny? What are we doing here?"

Without missing a beat, Kondraki replied without turning to face Gerald, "There's been a major breach at the temporary site where those Skips were sent after the Insurgency attacks. Send out alerts to every major Site and MTF, and begin a collaborative study to find out what the hell just happened… because the O5s are gonna want to know every bit of what the hell just happened."

A/N

And that's that! Not gonna lie, this one wasn't that strong in my opinion, and I've recenlty found that it's rather difficult for me to feature every displaced SCP and include more Stranger Things characters than in previous chapters in a single individual one, so please forgive me if this chapter was lacking compared to the previous ones thus far.

With that in mind, that brings up a few topics and issues: Which of the SCPs would you like to see featured more? Which of the Stranger Things cast should be introduced/featured more? How long should the chapters be? No, seriously, I am an amateur writer and would really like to get better at writing these.

For those of you worried about how this story will play out, do not worry. I have a set outline in mind and will eventually get to cover every one of the major characters from both series, so no one from either franchise will be left out.

Another piece of news: I have recently started another story! For those interested, it is a RWBY + Metal Gear crossover whose first chapter will be uploaded around the same time this is. For anyone who wants to read it, you may find it to be somewhat different than the other RWBY + Metal Gear crossover stories posted, though whether the quality is better or worse is up to you. Don't worry, this story will take priority and I intend to finish it first. For those not interested... pretend you never read this paragraph and continue on.

Thanks for reading, and see ya next time!